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FALL 25¢

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THE Deadly WEEKEND

A Complete Mystery Novel

By FREDRIC BROWN

—

THE DOG DIED FIRST

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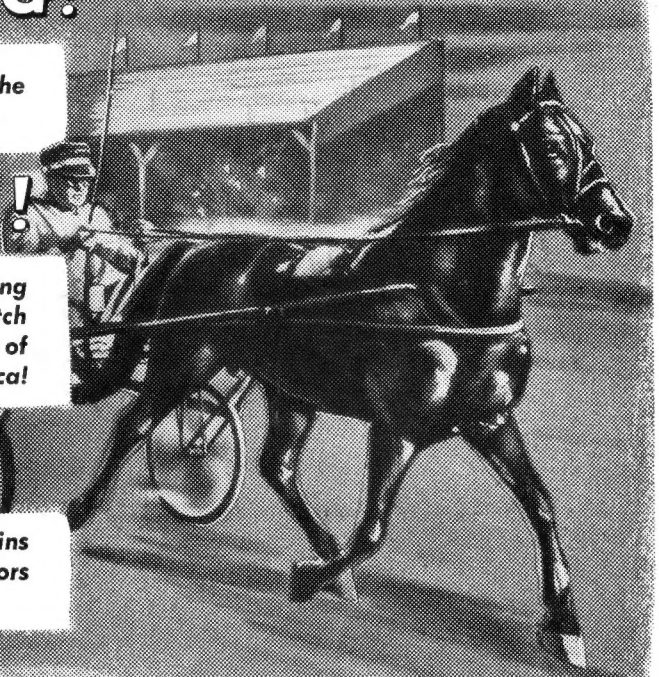

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Vol. 9, No. 1 FALL, 1949 Price 25c

A Complete Novel

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While Sweeney risks his neck to unravel the odd and baffling case of the screaming Mimi, terror hovers over Chicago—and a maniacal and mysterious "ripper" succeeds in claiming four lethal victims!

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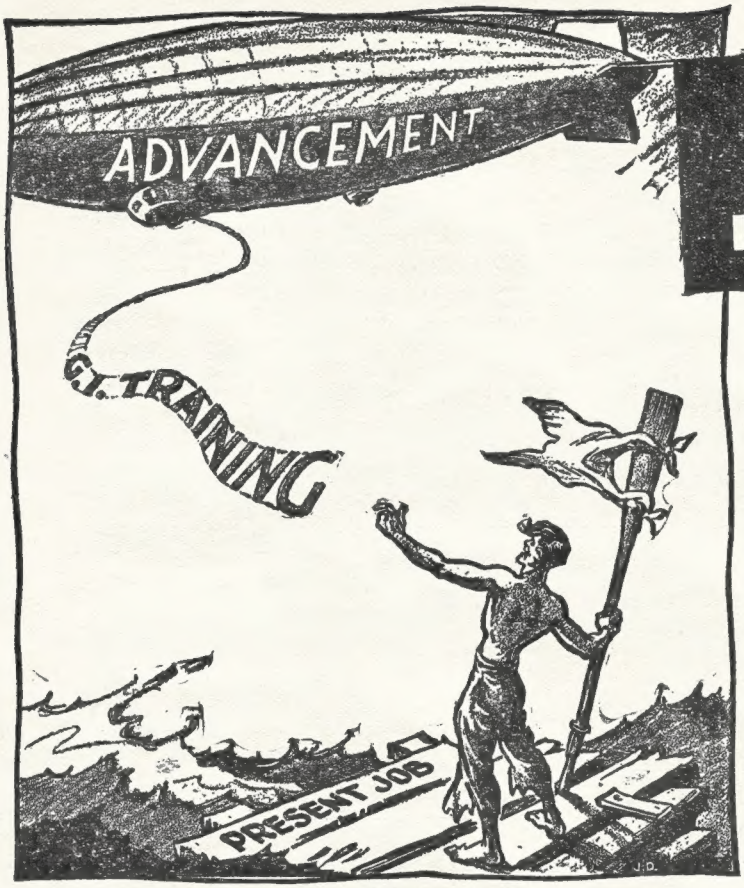

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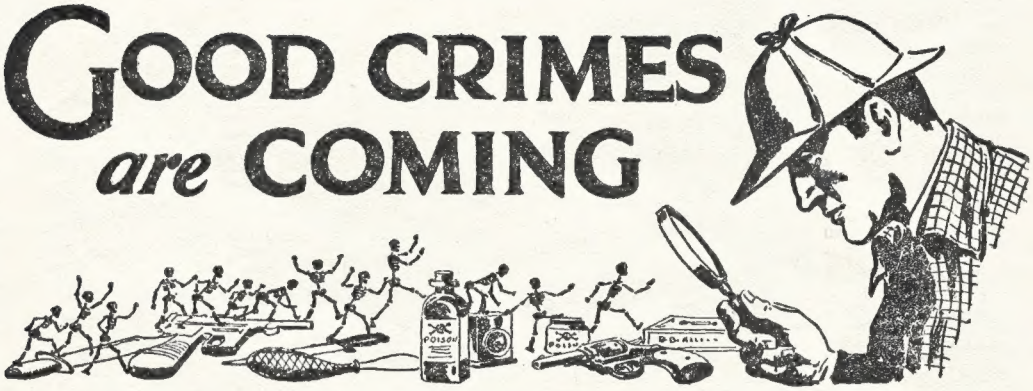

A Preview of Cases on the Calendar for Our Next Issue

MARRIAGE is an age-old institution without which society, as we know it today, could not long survive. Although some people swear at it, there are many more who swear by it. When bride and groom take each other for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health until death does them part, there is implied a solemn bond of partnership, of share and share alike in the life that lies ahead of them.

The idea of sharing the responsibilities of married life is never more clearly evidenced than in those unions where the couples blend their talents in both the domestic and business world. All of us can call to mind almost instantly famous husband and wife teams in our work-a-day existence.

Just look at the entertainment world for an instant. We have that famous radio comedy duo of Fibber McGee and Molly; the breakfast team of Dorothy and Dick (Dorothy Kilgallen and Dick Kollmar); the very popular Tex and Jinx McCrary; and in the movies we have Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart. And in the world of adventure and exploration we have Commander Finn Ronne and his wife who accompanied the U. S. Naval expedition to the Antarctic. Mrs. Ronne, incidentally, was the first white woman to go into the Antarctic.

Whodunit Teams

Turning to the world of mystery writing —which is our particular business at hand —we also find an outstanding example of teamwork between husband and wife. There is no more warmly regarded couple in the whodunit field than pretty Audrey Kelley and her husband, Bill Roos, who pool their talents to turn out very successful detective novels under the pseudonym of Kelley Roos.

To whodunit fans the Roos team is well known for the creation of the husband and wife sleuthing combination of Jeff and Haila Troy. The Troys have run through a gamut of exciting adventures in such books as "Sailor, Take Warning", "Frightened Stiff", "If the Shroud Fits" and "Made up to Kill".

It is now the pleasure of the editors of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE to announce that the highlight of our next issue will be a long, breathtaking novelet by Kelley Roos entitled "Waltz with Death" In addition to this great story we can promise our readers two more long novelets by Wyatt Blassingame and Arthur Leo Zagat together with a host of short stories and features. Here is the line-up of the three featured novelets:

WALTZ WITH DEATH
By Kelley Roos

THE DARK DOORWAY
By Wyatt Blassingame

PORTRAIT OF A KILLER
By Arthur Leo Zagat

"Waltz with Death" by Kelley Roos is a real spine-tingler, packed with almost unbearable suspense and highlighted by some very fine writing.

It all began when young Judy Coulter waited in the lobby of the Daily Globe Building for her newspaper columnist husband, Stan, to come down in the elevator. It was not a pre-arranged meeting. Actually Judy was there to spy on his activities.

This was Wednesday and every Wednes-

day for the past few weeks Stan had had some excuse to take him away from home at night. The first time he had been late had been because of a dental appointment—but a few days afterward the dentist had telephoned to remind Stan about coming in for a check-up. The second Wednesday he begged off from dinner because he wanted to see off an English light-heavyweight who was sailing for home. But the only boat actually sailing for England that night was a cattle boat!

The third time Stan claimed he was going to see a scalp specialist about his loose dandruff and falling hair. But Judy knew that when Stan's hair fell, he would fall with it and his dandruff, if any, was as tight as a drum. So it began to look as if Stan had somebody else on the string. And with their fifth wedding anniversary party coming up soon Judy was feeling rather low.

On With the Dance

Suddenly the elevator door opened and Stan stepped out, looking dapper as usual. He didn't see Judy. He rushed out of the Globe Building, headed uptown on Lexington Avenue with Judy at his heels. At 50th Street he turned into an office building and took an elevator to the fourteenth floor.

Judy took the next elevator to the same floor. Once out of the elevator she found herself in a luxurious suite with a beautiful blond receptionist. She saw Stan walking down a corridor. He entered a room. Judy got past the receptionist without being observed and hurried to the room. There was a glass peephole in the door. Judy peered through it.

That was when she got her first shock. Stan had his arms around a lovely brunette and they were dancing! From Stan's stumbling efforts Judy realized that he was taking dancing lessons. And, of all things, he was learning to waltz.

A wave of happiness rippled through Judy. She realized Stan was doing this for her. All the Wednesday secrecy was to surprise her at their anniversary. Judy returned to the reception room. She resolved to tell the dancing teacher about instructing him in the fox trot since waltzes weren't popular.

The blonde receptionist was busy and paid Judy no attention. Pupils for the six o'clock classes began to arrive. After they had been

(Continued on page 155)

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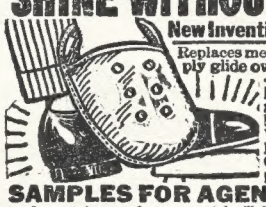

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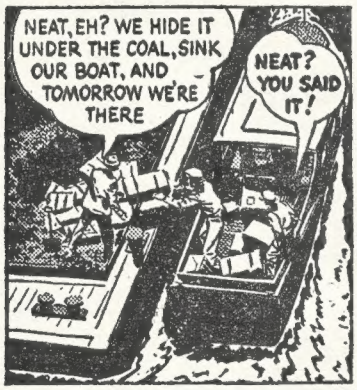

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The DEADLY Weekend

Sweeney risks his neck to unravel the strange case of the screaming Mimi!

a novel by
FREDRIC BROWN

CHAPTER 1

YOU can never tell what a drunken Irishman will do. You can make a flying guess; you can make a lot of flying guesses.

You can list them in order of their probability. The likely ones are easy—he might go after another drink, start a fight, make a speech, take a train. . . .

You can work down the list of possibilities—he might buy some green paint, chop down a maple tree, do a fan dance, sing *God Save the King*, steal an oboe. . . .

You can work on down and down

to things that get less and less likely and eventually you might hit the rock bottom of improbability—he might make a resolution and stick to it.

I know that that's incredible, but it happened. A guy named Sweeney did it, once. in Chicago. He made a resolution and he had to wade through blood and black coffee to keep it but he kept it.

His name really was Sweeney but he was only five-eighths Irish and he was only three-quarters drunk. But that's about as near as truth ever approximates a pattern, and if you won't settle for that, you'd better quit reading. If you don't, maybe you'll be sorry, for it isn't a nice story. It's got murder in it, and women and liquor and gambling and even prevarication. Don't say I didn't warn you. But if you're still with me, let's get back to Sweeney.

Sweeney sat on a park bench, that summer night, next to God. Sweeney rather liked God, although not many people did. God was a tallish, scrawny old man with a short but tangled beard, stained with nicotine. His full name was Godfrey. I say his full name advisedly, for no one, not even Sweeney, knew whether it was his first name or his last.

He was a little cracked, but not much. No more, perhaps, than the average for his age of the bums who live on the near north side of Chicago and hang out, when the weather is good, in Bughouse Square.

Bughouse Square has another name, but the other name is much less appropriate. It is between Clark and Dearborn Streets, just south of the Newberry Library. That's its horizontal location. Vertically speaking, it's quite a bit nearer hell than heaven.

TWO O'CLOCK of a summer night, and Bughouse Square had quieted down. The soap-box speakers were gone and the summer night crowds of strollers who were not habitués of the square were long in bed. On the grass and on the benches, men slept. Their shoelaces were tied in hard knots so their shoes would not be stolen in the night. The theft of money from their pockets was the least of their worries—there was no money there to steal. That was why they slept.

"God," said Sweeney, "I wish I had another drink." He shoved his disreputable hat an inch farther back upon his disreputable head.

"And I," said God. "But not bad enough."

"*That* stuff again," Sweeney said.

God grinned a little. He said, "It's true, Sweeney. You know it is." He pulled a crumpled package of cigarettes from his pocket, gave one to Sweeney, and lighted one himself.

Sweeney dragged deeply at the fag. He stared at the sleeping figure on the bench across from him, then lifted his eyes a little to the lights of Clark Street beyond. His eyes were a bit blurry from the drink; the lights looked haloed, but he knew they weren't. There wasn't a breath of breeze.

He felt hot and sweaty, like the park, like the city. He took his hat off and fanned himself with it. Then some three-quarter drunken impulse made him hold the hat still and stare at it. It had been a new hat three weeks ago. He'd bought it while he was still working at the *Blade*. Now it looked like nothing on earth. It had been run over by an auto, it had rolled in a muddy gutter, it had been sat on and stepped on. It looked like Sweeney felt.

He said, "I wish I could sleep." He stood up. "Going to walk a few blocks. Come along?"

"And lose the bench?" God wanted to know. "Naw. I guess I'll go to sleep, Sweeney. See you around." God eased himself over sidewise onto the bench, resting his head in the curve of his arm.

Sweeney grunted and walked out the path to Clark Street. He swayed a little but not much. He walked across the night, south on Clark Street, past Chicago Avenue. He passed taverns and wished he had the price of a drink.

A cop, coming toward him said, "Hi, Sweeney," and Sweeney said, "Hi, Pete," but kept on walking. And he thought about one of Godfrey's pet theories and he thought, the old so-and-so's right. You can get anything you want if you want it badly enough. He could easily have hit Pete for half a check or even a buck—if he'd wanted a drink that bad. Maybe tomorrow he'd want one that bad.

He passed Huron, Erie. He thought

maybe if he walked on down to the Loop, some of the boys from the *Blade* would be hanging out in the place on Randolph and he could borrow something there. Had he been there yet this time, this drunk? Damn the fog in his brain. And how far gone was he now? Did he still look all right to go into the place on Randolph?

He watched along the windows for a mirrored one and found it. He looked at himself and decided he didn't look too bad, too far gone. His hat was out of shape and he didn't have a necktie and his suit was baggy, naturally, but—

Then he stepped closer and wished he hadn't because that was too close and he really saw himself. Bleary red eyes, a beard that must be at least three days, maybe four, and the horrible dirtiness of his shirt collar. It had been a white shirt a week ago. And he saw the stains on his suit.

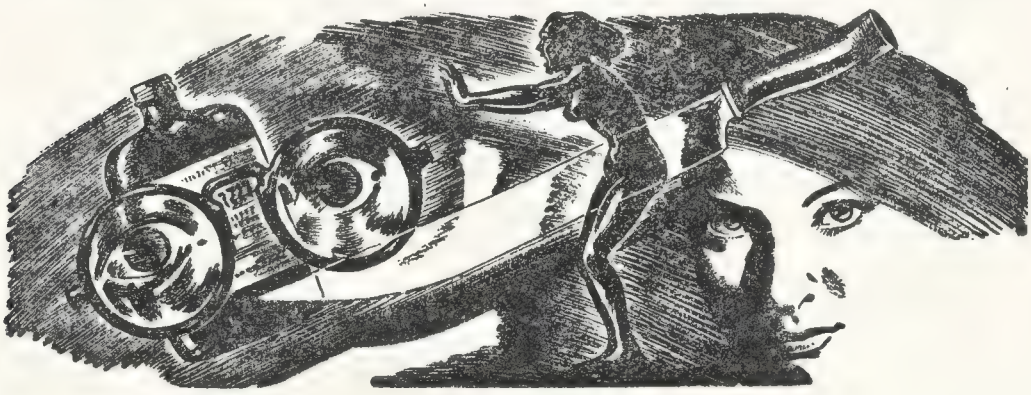
He looked away and started walking again. He knew now he couldn't look up any of the boys from the paper, not at this stage. Earlier on a drunk, yes, when he still looked all right. Or maybe later, when he didn't care how he looked.

HE walked across Ontario Street, across the night. He was swearing aloud as he walked but didn't know he was doing it. He thought, The Great Sweeney Walking Across the Night and tried to throw his thoughts out of perspective, but they wouldn't throw.

Looking into the mirror had been bad. But, worse than that, now that he was thinking about himself, he could smell himself—the stale sweat of his body. He hadn't been out of the clothes he was wearing since—how long ago was it his landlady had refused to give him the key to his room? Ohio Street.

He'd better quit walking south or he would find himself in the Loop, so he turned east. Where *was* he going? What did it matter? Maybe if he walked long enough he'd get so damned tired he could sleep.

Hell, he'd do anything for a drink—



except, the way he looked and felt tonight, look up anybody he knew.

Someone was coming toward him on the sidewalk. A pretty boy in a bright checked sport jacket. Sweeney's fists clenched. What would be his chances if he slugged the fairy, grabbed his wallet and ran into the alley? But he hadn't ever done that before and his reactions were too slow. The fairy, edging to the outside of the sidewalk, was past him before Sweeney could make up his mind.

A sedan went by, slowly, and Sweeney saw that it was a squad car with two big coppers in it and he went a little weak at the narrowness of his escape. He concentrated on walking straight and looking sober and realized that he was still swearing to himself and stopped. The squad car cruised on without slowing down.

He hesitated at the corner of Dearborn and decided to walk back north on State Street, so he went another block east. A streetcar rolled by on flat wheels, sounding like the end of the world. An empty taxi cruised by,

heading south, and for a minute Sweeney considered hailing it and going down to Randolph, telling the driver to wait until he went inside and got some money.

He turned north on State Street—Past Erie, Huron. He was feeling a little better now. Not much, but a little. Superior Street. Superior Sweeney, he thought. Sweeney Walking Across the Night, Across Time—

And then, quite suddenly, he was aware of the crowd standing around the entrance door of the apartment building a quarter of a block ahead of him.

It wasn't much of a crowd. Just a dozen or so queerly assorted people—the odd random dozen that would collect first on North State Street at two-thirty in the morning, standing there looking through the glass doors into the hallway of the building. And there seemed to be a funny noise that Sweeney couldn't quite place. It sounded almost like an animal growling.

Sweeney didn't hasten his steps. Probably, he realized, just a drunk that had had a fall or been sapped, lying unconscious—or dead—in there until the ambulance came and collected him. Probably lying in a pool of blood—not as many as a dozen people would be standing there looking at him if he was just out cold.

In his days as a legman he'd seen enough blood to last him. Like the time he was right after the cops going into the pool hall on Townsend Street where the four reefered-up jigs had had the razor party—

He started out around the people standing there without even turning to look over their shoulders. He almost got past before three things stopped him. Two of them were sounds and the third was a silence.

The silence was the silence of the crowd—if you can call a dozen people a crowd. One of the sounds was the siren of an approaching police car, less than a block away, just slowing down on Chicago Avenue to the north, getting ready to swing the corner into State Street.

Maybe, Sweeney realized, what was in the hallway of the building was a corpus delicti. And if it was, with the cops coming, it wasn't smart to be seen heading *away* from the scene of a crime. The cops grabbed you to ask questions.

If you were standing there gawking instead they'd shove you away and tell you to move on, and then you could move on. The other sound was a repetition of the one he'd heard first and he heard it clearly now, over the silence of the crowd and under the wail of the siren. It *was* the growling of an animal.

ADD up all those reasons, and you can't blame him, can you? Not even after everything it led to. Sweeney turned and looked.

He couldn't see anything, of course, except the backs of a dozen miscellaneous people. He couldn't hear anything except the growling of an animal in front of him and the wail of a police siren behind him. The car was swinging in to the curb.

Maybe it was the sound of the car, maybe it was the sound of the animal, but some of the people in the middle of the group started backing away from the glass double door of the apartment building. And Sweeney saw the glass doors and — through them. Not very clearly, because there wasn't any light on inside the hallway. Just the light that came in from the street lamps illuminated the scene within.

He saw the dog first, because the dog was nearest the glass, looking out through it. Dog? It *must* be a dog, here in Chicago. If you'd seen it out in the woods, you'd have taken it for a wolf. It was standing stiff-legged about four feet back from the glass doors. The hairs on the back of its neck were raised and its lips were drawn back in a tight snarl that showed teeth that looked an inch long. Its eyes glowed yellow.

Sweeney shivered a little as his eyes met those yellow ones. And they *did* seem to meet Sweeney's. Naked yellow savagery boring into red, bleary weariness.

It almost sobered him, and it made him look away, uneasily, at what lay on the floor of the hallway beside and slightly behind the dog. It was the figure of a woman, lying face down on the carpeting.

The word *figure* is not lightly used. Her white shoulders gleamed, even in that dim light, above a strapless white silk evening gown that molded every beautiful contour of her body—at least those contours visible when a woman is

lying face downward—and Sweeney caught his alcoholic breath at the sight of her.

He couldn't see her face, for the top of her page-boy-bobbed blond head was turned toward him, but he knew that her face would be beautiful. It would *have* to be. Women don't come with bodies as beautiful as that without faces to match.

He thought she moved a little. The dog growled again, a low-pitched sound under the high-pitched squeal of brakes as the police car stopped at the curb. Without turning to look behind him, Sweeney heard the doors of the car open, and the heavy sound of footsteps.

A hand on Sweeney's shoulder pushed him aside, not too gently, and a voice that meant business asked, "What's wrong? Who phoned?" But the voice wasn't talking to Sweeney particularly and he didn't answer it nor turn.

Nobody answered.

Sweeney teetered a little from the push, and then recovered his balance. He could still see into the hallway.

There was a flashlight in the hand of the blue-serged man beside him. With a click it shot a beam of bright white light into the dim hallway beyond the glass doors. It caught the yellow glow of the dog's savage eyes and the yellow glow of the bobbed blond hair of the woman. It caught the white gleam of her shoulders and the white gleam of her dress.

The man holding the flashlight pulled in his breath in a soft little whistle and didn't ask any more questions. He took a step forward and reached for the knob of the door.

The dog quit growling and crouched to spring. The silence was worse than the growl. The man in blue serge took his hand off the knob as though he'd found it red hot.

"The hell!" he said. He put a hand inside the left lapel of his coat but didn't draw the gun. Instead he addressed the little knot of people again. "What goes on here? Who phoned? Is the dame in there sick or drunk or what?"

Nobody answered. He asked, "Is that *her* dog?"

Nobody answered. A man in a gray suit was beside the man in blue serge. He said, "Take it easy, Dave. We don't want to shoot the pooch if we don't have to."

"Okay," said Blue Serge. "So you open the door and pet the dog while I take care of the dame. That ain't no dog anyway. It's a wolf or a devil."

"Well—" Gray Suit reached a hand for the door, and pulled it back as the dog crouched again and bared its fangs.

Blue Serge snickered. He asked, "What *was* the call? You took it."

"Just said a woman lying passed out in the hallway. Didn't mention the dog. Guy put in the call from tavern on the corner north. Gave his name."

"Gave a name," said Blue Serge cynically. "Look, if I was sure the dame was just passed-out drunk we could phone the humane society to pull off the pooch. They could handle it. I *like* dogs: I don't want to shoot that one. Prob'ly belongs to the dame and thinks he's protecting her."

"Thinks, hell," said Gray Suit. "He damn well is. I like dogs too. But I wouldn't swear that thing's a dog. Well—"

GRAY SUIT started peeling off his suit coat. He said, "So okay, I'll wrap this around my arm and you open the door and when the dog jumps me I'll clip him with the butt of—"

"Lookit—the dame's moving!"

The dame *was* moving. She was lifting her head. She pushed up a little with her hands—Sweeney noticed now that she wore long white cloth gloves that came halfway to her elbows—and lifted her head so her eyes stared full into the bright spotlight of the flashlight's beam.

Her face *was* beautiful. Her eyes looked dazed, unseeing.

"Drunk," Blue Serge said. "Look, Harry, you might kill the dog, even if you clip it with the butt of your gun, and somebody'd raise hell. The dame would raise hell when she sobers up. I'll wait here and keep watch and you get the station on the two-way and tell 'em to send the humane guys here with a net or whatever they use and—"

There was a gasp from several throats that shut Blue Serge up as suddenly as though a hand had been clapped across his mouth.

Somebody said "Blood!" almost inaudibly.

Weakly, as in a daze, the woman was trying to get up. She got her knees under her body and pushed herself up until her arms were straight. The dog be-

side her moved quickly and Blue Serge swore and yanked at his shoulder-holstered gun as the dog's muzzle went toward the woman's face. But before the gun was out the dog had licked the woman's face once with a long red tongue, whimpering.

And then, as both detectives made a quick move toward the door, the dog crouched again and growled.

But the woman was still getting up. Everyone could see the blood now, an oblong stain of it on the front of her white evening dress, over the abdomen. And—in the bright spotlight that made the thing seem like an act on a stage or something seen in the glass screen of a televised horror show—they could see the five-inch-long cut in the white cloth in the center of the oblong stain.

Gray Suit said, *"A shiv. The Ripper."*

Sweeney got shoved farther to one side as the two detectives pushed closer. He stepped around behind them, watching over their shoulders. He'd forgotten all about his idea of getting away as soon as he could. He could have walked away now and nobody would have noticed. But he didn't.

Gray Suit was standing with his coat half on and half off, frozen in the act of removing it. He jerked it back on and his shoulder jarred Sweeney's chin.

He barked, "Phone on the two-way for an ambulance and homicide, Dave. I'll try to crease the dog."

His shoulder hit Sweeney's chin again as he too pulled a gun from his shoulder holster. His voice got calm suddenly as the gun was in his hand. He said, "Reach for the knob, Dave. The dog'll freeze to jump you and I'll have a clear shot. I think I can crease him."

But he didn't raise the gun and Dave didn't move to reach for the knob. For the incredible thing was happening, the thing that Sweeney wasn't ever going to forget—and that probably no one of the fifteen or twenty people who by then were in front of the doorway was ever going to forget.

The woman in the hallway had one hand on the wall, beside the row of mailboxes and buzzer buttons. She was struggling to a standing position, her body erect but still resting on one knee. The bright white light of the flash framed her like a spotlight on a stage, the whiteness of her dress and gloves and skin and the redness of that oblong patch of blood. Her eyes were still dazed.

It must have been shock, Sweeney realized, for that knife wound couldn't have been deep or serious or it would have bled much, much more. She closed her eyes now as, swaying a little, she got up off the other knee and stood straight.

And the incredible thing happened.

The dog padded back and reared up behind her, on his hind feet but without pushing his fore paws against her. His teeth went to the back of the white dress, the strapless evening gown, caught something, pulled out and down. And the something — they found out later—was a white silk tab attached to a long zipper.

Gently the dress fell off and became a white silken circle around her feet. She had worn nothing under the dress, nothing at all.

FOR what seemed like minutes but was probably about ten seconds, nobody moved, nothing moved. Nothing happened except that the flashlight shook just a little in Blue Serge's hand.

Then the woman's knees began to bend under her and she went down slowly—not falling, just sinking down like someone who is too weary to stand any longer—on top of the white circle of silk in which she had stood.

Then a lot of things happened at once. Sweeney breathed again for one thing. And Blue Serge sighted his gun very carefully toward the dog and pulled the trigger. The dog fell and lay in the hallway and Blue Serge went through the door and called back over his shoulder to Gray Suit.

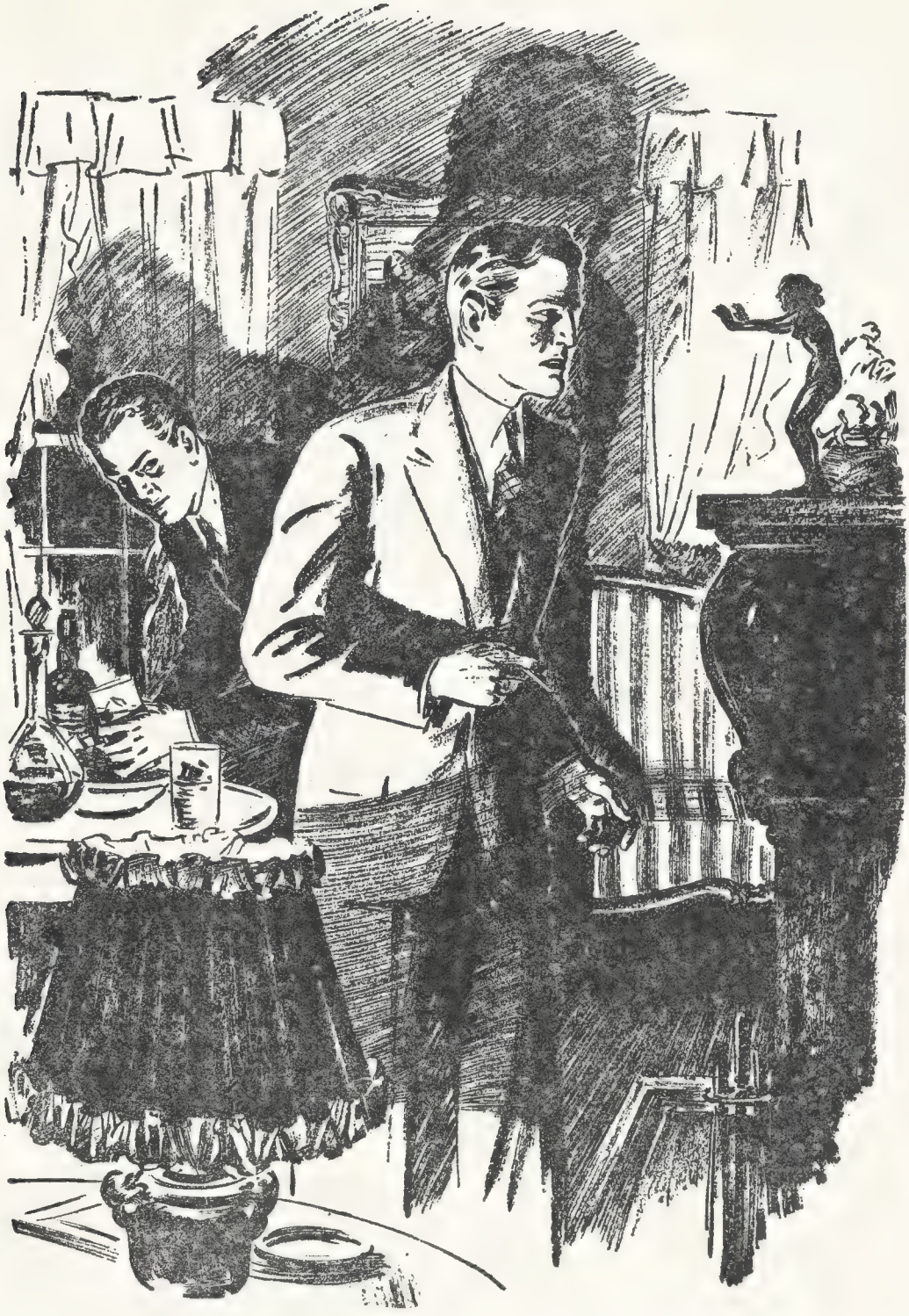
"Get the ambulance, Harry. Then tie that dog's legs. I don't think I killed him. I just creased him."

Sweeney backed away and nobody paid any attention to him as he walked north to Delaware and then turned west to Bughouse Square.

Godfrey wasn't on the bench, but he couldn't have been gone long, for the bench was still empty and benches don't stay empty long on a summer night. Sweeney sat down and waited till the old man came back.

"Hi, Sweeney," God said. He sat down beside Sweeney. "Got a pint," he said. "Want a slug?"

It had been a silly question and Sweeney didn't bother to answer it. He held



Sweeney's gaze came to rest on a ten-inch-high statuette over the fireplace (Chap. VI)

out his hand. And God hadn't expected an answer. He was holding out the bottle. Sweeney took a long pull.

"Thanks," he said. "Listen, she was beautiful, God. She was the most beautiful dame—" He took another, shorter pull at the bottle and handed it back. He said, "I'd give my right arm."

"Who?" God asked.

"The dame. I was walking north on State Street and—" He stopped, realizing he couldn't tell about it. He said, "Skip it. How'd you get the likker?"

"Stemmed a couple blocks." God sighed. "I told you I could get a drink if I wanted it bad enough. I just didn't want it bad enough before. A guy can get anything he wants if he wants it bad enough."

"Nuts," Sweeney said automatically. Then, suddenly, he laughed. *"Anything?"*

"Anything you want," said God, dogmatically. "It's the easiest thing in the world, Sweeney. Take rich men. Easiest thing in the world—anybody can get rich. All you got to do is want money so bad it means more to you than anything else. Concentrate on money and you get it. If you want other things worse you don't."

Sweeney chuckled. He was feeling swell now. That long drink had been just what he needed. He'd kid the old man by getting him to argue his favorite subject.

"How about women?" he said.

"What do you mean, how about women?" God's eyes looked a little foggy. He was getting drunker. And a touch of Bostonian broad *a* was coming back into his speech, as it always did when he was really drunk. "You mean, could you get any particular woman you wanted?"

"Yeah," said Sweeney. "Suppose there's a particular dame, for instance, I'd like to spend a night with. Could I do that?"

"If you wanted to bad enough, of course you could, Sweeney. If you concentrated all your efforts, direct and indirect, to that one objective, sure. Why not?"

Sweeney laughed again. The laugh subsided to a chuckle and he took off his hat and fanned himself with it. Then he stared at the hat as though he had never seen it before and began to dust it off carefully with the sleeve of his coat and to reshape it so it looked more like a hat. He worked with the absorbed concentration of a child threading a needle.

God had to ask him a second time before he heard the question. Not that it hadn't been a foolish question to begin with—God hadn't expected an answer verbally. He was holding out the bottle.

Sweeney didn't take it. He put his hat back on and stood up. He winked at God and said, "No thanks, pal. I got a date."

CHAPTER II

DAWN was different. Dawn's always different.

Sweeney opened his eyes and it was dawn, a hot gray still dawn. Leaves hung listlessly on the trees over his head and the ground was hard under him. All his body ached. His mouth felt and tasted as though the inside of it was caked with something unmentionable.

He rubbed his eyes with the hairy backs of dirty hands and swore at a bird that was making a racket in a nearby tree. He sat up and leaned forward, his face in his hands, the bristle of his beard coarse against the palms of them. A streetcar went by on Clark Street and it didn't sound any louder than an earthquake or the crack of doom. Not much louder, anyway.

Awakening is never a good thing. Sometimes it can be a horrible thing. With the cumulative hangover of two weeks of drinking it *is* a horrible thing.

But the thing to do, Sweeney knew, was to get moving, not to sit there and suffer, not to lie back down on the hard ground and try to go back to sleep.

Sweeney pushed the ground away from him and stood up. His legs worked. They carried him off the grass to the cement and along the walk to the bench where Godfrey lay still asleep and snoring gently. On the bench next to him lay the bottle, empty.

Sweeney pushed God's feet back and sat down gingerly on the edge of the bench. He put his rough chin in his filthy hands and rested his elbows on his knees but he didn't close his eyes. He kept them open.

Had he finally gone over the edge, he wondered. The dame and the dog. He'd never hallucinated before.

The dame and the dog.

He didn't believe it. It was one of the few things that couldn't have happened. So it hadn't happened. That was logic.

He held his hand out in front of him and it was shaking. He put it back down on the bench and used it and his other hand to push himself up. His legs still worked. They carried him across the square to Dearborn and south on Dearborn—a walking ache rather than a man—to Chicago Avenue.

Brakes squealed as a taxi swerved to avoid hitting him as he crossed Chicago Avenue diagonally, without looking to either side. The taxi driver yelled something at him. Sweeney walked along the south side of Chicago Avenue to State Street and turned south.

He walked three-quarters of a block and there was the Door. He stopped and stared at it and after a while he went close to it and looked through the glass. It was dim inside but he could see through the hallway to the door at the back.

A newsboy came along, a bag of papers slung over his shoulder. He stopped beside Sweeney. He said, "Jeez, that's where it happened, ain't it?"

"Yeah," said Sweeney.

"I *know* the broad," said the newsboy. "I leave her a paper." He reached past Sweeney for the knob of the door. "Gotta get in to leave some papers." Sweeney stepped aside to let him past.

WHEN the newsboy came out Sweeney went in. He walked back a few steps beside the mailboxes. This, where he was standing, was where she'd fallen. He looked down, then stooped to look closer. There were a few little dark dots on the floor.

Sweeney stood up again and walked to the back. He opened the door there and looked through it. There was a cement walk that led back to the alley. That was all. He closed the door and flicked the light switch to the left of it, at the foot of the stairs leading upward.

Two bulbs went on, one overhead at the foot of the stairs, the other overhead up front by the mailboxes. The yellow light was sickly in the gray morning. He flicked it off again, then—as he noticed something on the wooden panel of the door—back on.

There were long closely-spaced vertical scratches on the wood. They looked fresh and they looked like the clawmarks of a dog. They looked as though a dog had lunged against that door and then tried to claw his way through it.

Sweeney turned off the light again and went out, taking with him one of the papers the newsboy had left in clips under several of the mailboxes. He walked past the next corner before he sat down on a step and unfolded the paper.

It was a three-column splash with two pix, one of the girl and one of the dog. The heading was—

RIPPER ATTACKS
DANCER; SAVED BY
HER FAITHFUL DOG
Ripper Makes Escape;
"Can't Identify,"
Victim Says

Sweeney studied the two pictures, read the article through and studied the pictures again. Both were posed, obviously publicity stills. "Devil" was the caption under the picture of the dog and he looked it. In a newspaper pic you couldn't see that yellow balefulness in his eyes, but he still didn't look like anything you'd want to meet in an alley.

But his eyes went back to the woman's picture. The caption, "Yolanda Lang," made Sweeney wonder what her real name was. But—looking at that picture of her—you wouldn't care what her name was. The picture, unfortunately, didn't show as much of her as Sweeney had seen last night.

It was a waist-up shot and Yolanda Lang wore a strapless evening gown moulded to show off her outstanding features—which Sweeney well knew to be genuine and not padding—and her soft blond hair tumbled to her softer white shoulders. Her face was beautiful, too. Sweeney hadn't noticed her face last night. You couldn't blame him for that.

But it was worth noticing, now that there was less distraction to keep his eyes away from it. It was a face that was sweetly grave and gravely sweet. Except something about the eyes. But on an eighty-line screen newsprint picture you couldn't be sure about that.

Sweeney carefully folded the newspaper and put it down on the step beside

him. There was a crooked grin on his face.

He got up and trudged back to Bughouse Square.

God was still snoring on the bench. Sweeney shook him and God opened his eyes. He stared up blearily at Sweeney and said, "Go away."

Sweeney said, "I am. That's what I came to tell you. Look, I meant it."

"Meant what?"

"What I said last night," Sweeney said.

"You're crazy," God said.

That lopsided grin came back to Sweeney's face. He said, "You didn't see her. You weren't there. So long."

He cut across the grass to Clark Street and stood there a minute. He had a dull headache now, and he wanted a drink. He held out his hand and watched it shake, then put it in his pocket so he wouldn't have to think about it.

He started walking south on Clark. The sun was up now, slanting down the east-west streets. The traffic was getting heavy and noisy.

He thought, Sweeney Walking Across the Day.

He was sweating and it wasn't only from the heat. He smelled too and he knew it. His feet hurt. He was a mess, an aching mess, top and bottom and inside and out. Sweeney Walking Across the Day.

Across the Loop and on south to Roosevelt Road. He didn't dare stop. He turned the corner east on Roosevelt

"You fool, it's part of the act," Bline whispered as he grabbed Guerney's arm (Chap. X)

Road, kept on going a block and a half, turned into the entrance of an apartment building.

He rang a buzzer and stood waiting till the latch on the door clicked. He opened it and trudged upstairs to the third floor. A door at the front was ajar and a bald head stuck through it. The face under the bald head looked at Sweeney approaching and a disgusted look came over it.

The door slammed.

Sweeney put a dirty hand on the wall to steady himself and kept on coming. He started to knock on the door loudly. He knocked a full minute and then put a hand to his forehead to hold it awhile, maybe half a minute. He leaned against the wall.

He straightened up and started knocking again, louder.

He heard footsteps shuffle to the door. "Get the hell away or I'll call copper."

SWEENEY knocked again. He said, "Call copper then, palsy. We'll both go down to the jug and explain."

"What do you want?"

Sweeney said, "Open up." He started knocking again, still louder. A door down the hall opened and a woman's frightened face looked out.

Sweeney knocked some more. The voice inside said, "All right, *all right.* Just a second." The footsteps shuffled away and back again and the key turned.

The door opened and the bald man stepped back from it. He wore a shapeless bathrobe and scuffed slippers and apparently nothing else. He was a little smaller than Sweeney but he had his right hand in the pocket of the bathrobe and the pocket bulged.

Sweeney walked on in and kicked the door shut beside him. He walked to the middle of the cluttered room. He turned around and said, "Hi, Goetz," mildly.

The bald man was still beside the door. He said, "What do you want?"

"A double-saw," Sweeney said. "You know what for. Or shall I tell you in words of one syllable?"

"Like hell I'll give you a double-saw. If you're still harping back to that goddam horse, I told you I didn't shove the bet. I gave you your fin back. You took it."

"I took it on account," Sweeney said. "I didn't need the money bad enough then to get tough about it. Now I do. So okay, let's review the bidding. You touted me on that oatburner. It was *your* idea. So I gave you a fin to bet and the horse came in at five for one and you tell me you didn't get the bet down for me."

"I didn't. The heat was on. Mike's was closed and—"

"You didn't even try Mike's. You just held the bet. If the horse had lost—like you expected—you'd have kept my fin. So whether you got the bet down or not you owe me twenty."

"The hell I do. Get out."

The bald man took his hand out of the bathrobe pocket and there was a little twenty-five-caliber automatic in it.

Sweeney shook his head sadly. He said, "If it was twenty grand, I'd be afraid of that thing — maybe. For twenty bucks you wouldn't put a shooting on your record. For a lousy double-saw you wouldn't have the cops up here, snooping around. Anyway, I don't think you would. I'll gamble on it."

He looked around the room until he saw a pair of pants hanging over the back of a chair. He started for the pants.

The bald man snicked the safety off the little automatic. He said, "You son of a—"

Sweeney picked up the pants by the cuffs and started shaking them. Keys and change hit the carpet and he kept on shaking. He said, "Someday, Goetz, you'll call a man one who *is* one and he'll take you apart."

A wallet from the hip pocket of the trousers hit the carpet and Sweeney picked it up. He flipped it open and grunted. There were only a ten and a five in the wallet.

He took the ten out and put it in his own pocket and tossed the wallet toward the dresser. He said, "What's the matter with the pool ticket racket, Goetz? *That* bad?"

The bald man's face wasn't pretty. He said, "I told you—the heat's on. You got your money. Now get out."

"I got ten," Sweeney said. "I wouldn't take a man's last fin, palsy. I'll take the other ten in trade. A bath and a shave and a shirt and socks."

Sweeney peeled off his coat and stepped out of his trousers. He sat down on the edge of the mussed-up bed and took off his shoes. He went into the bathroom and turned on the water to run in the tub.

He came out stark naked, holding a wadded-up ball that had been his shirt, socks and underwear and put it in the wastebasket.

The bald man was still standing by the door but he'd put the little automatic back into the pocket of the bathrobe.

Sweeney grinned at him. Over the roar of water running into the tub he said, "Don't call copper now, Goetz. With me dressed this way they might get the wrong idea."

He went into the bathroom and shut the door.

He soaked a long time in the tub, then shaved leisurely with Goetz's razor—providentially an electric one. Sweeney's hands were still shaking.

When he came out the bald man was in bed, his back to the room.

"Asleep, darling?" Sweeney asked.

There wasn't any answer.

Sweeney opened a drawer of the dresser and chose a white sport shirt with a soft collar. It was tight across the shoulders and the collar wouldn't button but it was a shirt and it was clean and white. A pair of Goetz's socks proved a bit small but they went on.

HE eyed his own shoes and suit with disgust but they'd have to do. Goetz's wouldn't fit. Sweeney did the best he could with a shoebrush and a clothesbrush. He made sure the ten-dollar bill was still in the pocket of his trousers when he put them on.

He brushed his hat and put that on, then stopped at the door.

He said, "Nighty-night, palsy, and thanks for everything. We're even now." He closed the door quietly and went downstairs and outside into the hot sunlight. He walked north on Dearborn, past the Dearborn Station. In a little restaurant opposite the front of it he had three cups of black coffee and managed to eat one doughnut of two he ordered. It tasted like library paste but he got it down.

Under the shadow of the El, two blocks north, he got his shoes shined and then waited, shaking a little, in a tiny cubbyhole in the back of the shop while his suit was sponged and pressed. It needed more than sponging but it didn't look too bad when he put it on.

He took a look at himself in the long mirror and decided he looked fair enough by now. There were circles under his eyes and the eyes themselves—well, he wasn't a thing of beauty and a joy forever and he had to remember to keep his hands in his pockets until he got over the trembling, but he looked human.

He spread the collar of the white sport shirt on the outside of the collar of his coat and that looked better, too.

He kept to the shady side of the street, walking north across the Loop. He was starting to sweat again and felt dirty already. He had a hunch he'd feel dirty for a long time, no matter how many baths he took.

Sweeney's headache was a rhythmic persistent throbbing in his forehead and behind his eyeballs. The palms of his hands were wet and felt clammy, despite how hot the rest of him was. No matter how often he wiped them on the sides of his trousers they were wet and clammy again immediately.

Sweeney Walking Across the Loop. At Lake Street, under the El again, he stopped in a drugstore for a double bromo and another cup of coffee. He felt like a coiled spring that was tied down too tightly. He felt like a claustrophobiac locked in a tiny room. He felt lousy.

He crossed Wacker Drive, hoping that a car would hit him, but none did. He walked across the bridge in the bright hot glare of sunshine and he lifted one foot and put it down and lifted the other and put that down for six blocks to Erie Street. He walked east past Rush and then—not daring to stop—he put his clammy hands into his pockets and went into the areaway between two buildings and through an open doorway.

This was home if it still was. This was the biggest hurdle for today. He took his right hand out of a pocket and rapped gently on a door off the downstairs hallway. He put his hand back quickly.

Heavy footsteps came slowly and the door opened. Sweeney said, "Hello, Mrs. Randall. Uh—"

Her sniff cut off whatever he'd been going to say. She said, "No, Mr. Sweeney."

"Uh—you mean you've rented my room?"

"I mean—no, you can't get in it to get something to hock to keep on drinking. I told you that last week—twice."

"Did you?" asked Sweeney vaguely. He didn't remember or did he? Now that she spoke of it, one of the two times came back to him dimly. "Guess I was pretty drunk." He took a deep breath. "But it's over now. I'm sober."

She sniffed again. "How about the three weeks you owe me? Thirty-six dollars."

Sweeney fumbled out the bills in his pockets, a five and three singles. "All I've got," he said. "I can give you eight dollars on account."

THE landlady looked from the bills up to Sweeney's face. She said, "I guess you're on the level, Sweeney, about sobering up. If you've *got* money, you aren't after stuff to hock. You could do a lot of drinking on eight dollars."

"Yes," Sweeney said.

She stepped back from the door. "Come on in." And, after he had followed her in, "Sit down. Put your money back in your pocket. You'll need it worse than I do till you get started again. How long'll that be?"

Sweeney sat down. "A few days," he said. "I can raise some money when I'm okay again."

He put his hands and the bills back in his pocket. "Uh—I'm afraid I lost my key. Do you have—"

"You didn't lose it. I took it away from you a week ago Friday. You were trying to carry out your phonograph to hock it."

Sweeney dropped his head into his hands. "Lord, *did* I?"

"You didn't. I made you take it back. And I made you give me the key. Your clothes are all there too, except your topcoat and overcoat. You must have taken them before that. And your typewriter. And your watch—unless you got it on."

Sweeney shook his head slowly. "Nope. It's gone. But thanks for saving the other stuff."

"You look like hell. Want a cup of coffee? I got some on."

"It's running out of my ears," Sweeney told her. "But—yes, I'll have another cup. Black."

He studied her as she got up and waddled over to the stove. There ought to be more landladies like Mrs. Randall, he thought. Tough as nails on the outside (they had to be to run a rooming house) and soft as butter inside. Most of them were tough all the way through.

She came back with the coffee and he drank it. He got his key and went up the stairs. He got inside and got the door closed before he started to shake. He stood there, leaning against the inside of the door until the worst of it was over. Then he made it to the washbasin and was sick at his stomach and that

helped, although the sound of the water running made his head hurt worse.

When that was over he wanted to lie down and sleep. Instead he stripped off his clothes, put on a bathrobe and went down the hall to the bathroom. He drew himself a hot tub and soaked in it for a long time before he went back to his room.

Before he dressed again he rolled up the spotted and worn suit he'd been wearing and the too-small shirt and sox he'd taken from the man named Goetz and put them into the waste-basket. He put on all clean clothes, including his best summer-weight suit. He put on a silk tie that had cost him five bucks and his best pair of shoes.

He straightened up the room carefully, even meticulously. He turned on the radio side of his radio-phono combination until he got a time announcement between programs and set the clock on his dresser and wound it. It was half-past eleven.

Then he got his panama hat out of the closet and went out.

Mrs. Randall's door opened as he started down the stairs. She called out, "Mr. Sweeney?" and he leaned over the bannister to look toward her. "Yes?"

"Forgot to tell you there was a phone call for you this morning, early, about eight o'clock. A Walter Krieg, from the paper you work for—or used to work for. Which is it?"

"Used to work for, I guess," Sweeney said. "What'd he say? What'd you say?"

"He asked for you and I said you weren't in. He said if you came back before nine to have you call him. You didn't—not that I was expecting you to—so I kinda forgot it. That's all that was said."

Sweeney thanked her and went on out. At the corner drugstore he bought a half-pint of whiskey and put it in his hip pocket. Then he went into the phone booth, dialed the *Blade* and asked for the managing editor by name.

"Krieg?" he said, "This is Sweeney. Just got home. Got your message. Sober. What you want?"

"Nothing now. It's too late, Sweeney. Sorry."

"All right, it's too late and you're sorry. But what *did* you want?"

"Eye-witness story—if you're sober enough to remember what you saw last night. A beat copper said you were around when the lid came off that Yolanda Lang business. Remember it?"

"More than the lid came off and I damn well remember it. Why's it too late? You got one edition on the streets but the main one's coming up and two others. The home edition's not in, is it?"

"Going in in fifteen minutes. Take you longer'n that to—"

"Quite wasting time," Sweeney said. "Put a rewrite man on the phone, now. I can give him half a column in five minutes. Gimme Joe Carey. He can take it fast."

"Okay, Sweeney. Hang on."

Sweeney hung on, getting his thoughts organized, until he heard Joe's voice. Then he started talking, fast.

When he was through he put the receiver back on the hook and leaned weakly against the wall of the phone booth. He hadn't asked to have Walter Krieg put back on the line—that could wait. He'd do better going in and seeing Walter personally.

But not yet, not just yet.

He went back to his room and put the little half-pint bottle of whiskey on the arm of the comfortable morris chair and a shot glass beside it. He hung up his suit coat and panama, loosened his collar and tie.

Then he went over to the phonograph and squatted down on his haunches in front of the shelf of albums. He studied the titles. Not that it mattered; he knew which one he was going to hear—the Mozart 40.

No, you wouldn't have thought it to look at him, maybe, but that was Sweeney's favorite—the Symphony No. 40, in G Minor, K. 550. He stacked the three records on the phonograph, flicked the switch to start the first one, and went over to the morris chair to sit and listen.

A needle dances in a groove and a diaphragm vibrates, and the air about you vibrates. And the thoughts, of a man a century and a half dead press upon you. You sit in light and the shadow of the soul of a man long dead. You share the troubled thoughts of a dapper little court musician in a horrible financial mess, perhaps feeling the end of his life was near and working at prodigious speed, turning out in a

few weeks the greatest symphony he ever wrote.

Yes, there are strange things. And there was Sweeney, pouring his second drink as the third disk dropped and the second movement started, the lighter andante.

He drank them neat, the third side of the album and the second drink. He sighed and pushed himself up out of the chair. The pain in his head was still there and the pain in his soul but the shaking of his hands was gone.

He rinsed out the glass and put away the little half-pint bottle, still more than half full. He turned over the three records on the phonograph, started it again and sat back down to listen to the rest of the 40.

He closed his eyes and just listened as the second movement ended and the dark-bright minuetto-and-trio of the third movement lived all too briefly and died and gave birth to what he had been waiting for—the bitter final movement, the allegro assai, the power and the melancholy glory.

And then Sweeney sat listening to the silence and after awhile he began to chuckle almost inaudibly.

He was *out* of it now, off the binge, sober. Until the next time, which might be months, might be a couple of years. However long until enough hell accumulated inside him that he'd have to soak it out. Until then he could be normal and drink normally.

He chuckled again, and he closed his eyes and thought back and remembered and saw again that incredible scene in the State Street hallway.

After a few seconds he quit chuckling. He told himself, "Sweeney, you're asking for trouble. You'll need money, for one thing. A dime-a-dozen reporter couldn't make the grade with that babe. For an in you'll have to hunt a ripper. And you might find him."

And that would be bad, Sweeney knew, because Sweeney had a horror—almost a phobia—of cold steel, cold sharp steel. Razor-edged steel in the hands of a madman, a homicidal maniac. A razor-like knife that can slash across your abdomen and spill your guts out on the sidewalk where they won't be a bit of use to you, Sweeney.

Sure, he told himself, "You're a damned fool, Sweeney."

But he'd known that for a long time.

CHAPTER III

SWEENEY headed for the *Blade*. He threaded his way across the city room and into the office of the managing editor. He sat down on the arm of the chair across the desk from Krieg.

He said, "Hi, Walter."

Krieg looked up and grunted, then finished the letter in his hand and put it down. He opened his mouth and closed it again.

Sweeney said, "I'll say it for you, Walter. First, I'm a so-and-so to have let you down and gone on a binge without giving you notice. I'm through. You can't mess with guys like me. I'm an anachronism. The days of the drunken reporter are over and a modern newspaper is a business institution run on business lines and not a Front Page out of Hecht by MacArthur. You want men you can count on. Right?"

"Yes, you son of—"

"Hold it, Walter. I said it for you, all of it. And anyway, I wouldn't work on your damn paper unless you hired me to. How was the eye-witness story?"

"It was good, Sweeney, damn good. That was a break in a million, your being there."

"You say a cop mentioned I was there. I didn't see one I recognized. Who was it?"

"You'll have to ask Carey. He handled the story. Look, Sweeney, how often do you go on a bat like that? Or are you going to tell me that was the last one?"

"It probably wasn't. It'll happen again. I don't know when. Maybe not for a couple of years. Maybe in six months. So you wouldn't want me to work for you. All right. But since I'm *not* working for you I got a little check coming for that eye-witness account.

"I'll let you do me one last favor, Walter. You can give me a voucher to get it now instead of putting it through the channels. That story was worth fifty bucks, if Carey wrote it like I told it to him. Will you settle for twenty-five?"

Krieg glared at him. "Not a damn cent, Sweeney."

"No? And why not? Since when have you been *that* much of a lousy—"

"Shut up!" The managing editor almost roared it. "Damn it, Sweeney, you're the toughest guy to do a favor for I ever saw. You won't even give me the satisfaction of bawling you out. You take the words out of my mouth so I can't say 'em.

"Who told you you were fired? *You* did. The reason you don't get paid for that piddling little story you gave over the phone is that you're still on the payroll. You've lost two day's pay, that's all."

"I don't get it," Sweeney said. "Why two days? I've been gone two weeks. What's two days got to do with it?"

"This is a Thursday, Sweeney. You started your drunk two weeks ago tonight and didn't come in Friday morning. Or Saturday. But you had two weeks vacation coming. Maybe you forgot. You were on the list for September. I gave you a break by switching your dates so you started your vacation a week ago last Monday.

"You're still on your vacation right now and you're not due back for a few more days yet—Monday, to be exact Here." Krieg yanked open a drawer of his desk and pulled out three checks. He held them across to Sweeney.

"You probably don't remember but you came in to try to get your last check only we didn't give it to you. It's there, two days short, and two full vacation week checks."

Sweeney took them wonderingly.

KRIEG said, "Now get the hell out of here until Monday morning and report for work then."

"The hell," said Sweeney. "I don't believe it."

"Don't then. But—no bull, Sweeney—if it happens again before your *next* vacation, next year, you're through for good."

Sweeney nodded slowly. He stood up.

"Listen, Walter, I—"

"Shut up. Beat it."

Sweeney grinned weakly, and beat it.

He stopped at Joe Carey's desk and said, "Hi."

Joe looked up and said, "Hi, yourself. What gives?"

"Want to talk to you, Joe. Had lunch yet?"

"No. Going in"—he looked at his wrist watch—"in twenty minutes. But listen, Sweeney, if it's a bite you've got in mind I'm broke. Wife just had another kid last week and you know how that is."

"No," said Sweeney. "Thank God I don't know how that is. Congratulations though. I presume it's a boy or a girl."

"Yeah."

"Good. Nope, it isn't a bite. Miraculously, I'm solvent. There is a God. In fact, do I owe you anything?"

"Five. Two weeks ago last Wednesday. Remember?"

"Vaguely, now that you mention it. So let's eat at Kirby's. I can cash a check there and pay you. I'll wander on down and meet you there."

Sweeney cashed the smallest of the three checks at the bar in Kirby's and then went over to a table to wait for Joe Carey. The thought of food still nauseated him. Eating anything at all was going to be so bad he'd rather get it over with before Joe came in. Watching Joe eat was going to be bad enough.

Sweeney ordered a bowl of soup as the least of evils. It tasted like hot dishwater to him but he managed to get most of it down and shoved the bowl aside as Joe came in and sat down across the table.

He said, "Here's your five, Joe, and thanks. Say, before I forget, who was it saw me there on State Street last night? I thought I didn't know either of the coppers I saw there."

"Harness bull by the name of Fleming—Pete Fleming."

"Oh," Sweeney said. "I remember now. I met him on Clark Street before that."

"Probably got there about as you were leaving. The car that answered the call—the cops in it were named Kravich and Guerney — cut in their siren on the way. Wherever Fleming was on his beat, he followed the siren and got there after they did. Thanks for the fin, Sweeney."

The waiter came up and Sweeney ordered coffee along with Carey's order.

Then he leaned across the table. He said, "Joe, what gives with this ripper business? That's what I want to pump you about. I could dig up some of the dope from the morgue files but you'll know more than they will. First, how long has it been going on?"

"You haven't read the papers for the last ten days?"

Sweeney shook his head. "Except for what was in one morning paper today, about the Yolanda Lang business last night. There were references to other killings. How many?"

"Besides Yolanda Lang, two—or it could be three. I mean, there was a slashing on the South Side two months ago that might not be the same guy. Broad by the name of Lola Brent."

"She die?"

"Sure. So did the two other dames besides this Lang woman. She's the only one who didn't get killed. Pooch saved her. But you know about that."

"What's the last word on Yolanda Lang?" Sweeney asked. "She still in the hospital?"

"Supposed to be released this evening. She wasn't hurt much. Point of the shiv just barely went through the skin. She had a spot of shock. That's all."

"So did some other people," said Sweeney. "Including me."

JOE CAREY licked his lips. "You didn't exaggerate that story any, Sweeney?"

Sweeney chuckled. "I underplayed it. You should haye been there, Joe."

"I'm a married man. Anyway, the cops are going to keep a guard on the Lang femme."

"A *guard?* Why?"

"They figure the killer might be inclined to go back after her because he might think she could put the finger on him. Matter of fact, she can't, or says she can't. A man, tallish, in dark clothes is the best she can do."

"The light was off in the hallway," Sweeney said.

"The ripper's waiting by the back door, at the foot of the stairs, probably standing outside it, holding it a little ajar. He hears her footsteps clicking along the hallway, steps inside and slashes. Only the pooch jumps past her after the guy and he jerks back through the door, almost missing the woman completely with the shiv and just barely gets away from the dog."

"It adds up," Sweeney said. "Was he after Yolanda Lang or was he just waiting for whoever came along?"

Carey shrugged. "Could be either way."

"She get home that time every night?"

"Every week night. She's on last at one-thirty week nights. They have shows later on Saturday and Sunday nights. She doesn't always go right home after the last show, though, she said. Sometimes stays around El Madhouse—that's the night club she's playing—know it?"

Sweeney nodded. "Who's handling it—outside, I mean."

"Horlick, only he starts vacation Monday. I don't know who Wally will put on after that."

Sweeney grinned. "Listen, Joe, do me a favor, will you? I *want* to work on it. *I* can't very well suggest it to Krieg, but you can, next time you talk to him. Suggest I got an inside start with that eye-witness business and since Horlick's leaving Monday and I'm coming back then, why not let me do the leg work. He'll fall for it if you suggest it. If *I* ask him—well, he might

[*Turn page*]

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not let me, just to be cussed."

"Sure, I can do that, Sweeney. But—you'll have to bone up on the details of the other cases and get in with the cops. They got a special ripper detail, by the way, working on nothing else. Cap Bline of Homicide's running it and got men under him. And the crime lab's analyzing everything they can get their hands on, only there hasn't been much to analyze."

"I'll be up on it," Sweeney said. "Between now and Monday I'll make a study of those files and get in with the cops."

"Why? On your own time, I mean. You got an angle, Sweeney?"

"Sure," Sweeney lied. "Got the assignment from a fact detective mag to write up the case, once it's solved. They don't handle unsolved cases but it's promised to me once the case is cracked. Ought to get a few hundred out of it.

"Joe, if you talk Krieg into giving me the case, so I'll have all the facts ready to write once they get the guy, I'll cut you in for ten percent. Ought to get you somewhere between twenty and fifty."

"What have I got to lose? I was going to do it for nothing."

"But now you'll be convincing," Sweeney said. "For a start, what are the names of the other dames who were slashed, the ones who died? You said the one on the south side a couple months ago was Lola Brent?"

"Check. Ten days ago, Stella Gaylord. Five days ago, Dorothy Lee."

"Any of the others strip teasers or show girls?"

"First one, this Lola Brent, was an ex-chorine. Living with a short-con man named Sammy Cole. Cops figured he killed her but they couldn't prove it and they couldn't crack him. So they threw the book at him on some fraud charges that came out and he's still in clink. So if he *did* kill Lola, he didn't kill the others or make the try for Yolanda."

"What were the other two gals?"

"Stella Gaylord was a B-girl on West Madison Street. The Lee girl was a private secretary."

"How private?"

"I wouldn't know," Carey said. "That didn't come out. She worked for some executive with the Reiss Corporation. Don't remember his name. Anyway, he was in New York on a buying trip."

CAREY glanced up at the clock; he'd finished eating. He said, "Look, Sweeney, those are the main points. I haven't got time to give you any more. I got to get back."

"Okay," Sweeney said. "What hospital is the Lang dame in?"

"Michael Reese, but you can't get in to see her. They got cops six deep in that corridor. Horlick tried to get in and couldn't."

"You don't know when she'll be back at El Madhouse?"

"Nope. Her manager could tell you. Guy by the name of Doc Greene."

Carey stood up. Sweeney reached for his check and got it. "I'm paying this. But tell me where I can locate this Greene character. What's his first name?"

"Dunno. Everbody calls him Doc. Wait—he's in the Goodman Block. Greene with a final e. You can find him from that. Or through the El Madhouse proprietor. He books all their acts. I think. So long."

Sweeney took a sip of his coffee, which he'd forgotten to drink and it was cold. He shuddered with revulsion at the taste of it and got out of Kirby's quick.

He stood in front a moment, hesitating which way to go, then headed back for the *Blade*. He didn't go to the editorial offices this time, though. He cashed his two other pay checks at the cashier's window and then went to the stack room.

He looked through papers of about two months before until he found the one that broke the story on the murder of Lola Brent. He bought finals for each of the past ten days.

It made quite a stack of papers, even when he'd thrown the stuffing out of the Sunday ones. He caught a cab to take them home.

On the way in he knocked on Mrs. Randall's door. He paid her the thirty-six dollars he owed her and two weeks in advance.

Upstairs in his room, he put the pile of papers on his bed, and then, outside in the hall, he looked up Greenes until he found one in the Goodman Block. *J. J. Greene, thtrcl. agt.*

He called the number and, after brief

argument with a secretary, got J. J. Greene.

"Sweeney, of the *Blade*," he said. "Could you tell me when your client is being released from Michael Reese?"

"Sorry, Mr. Sweeney, the police have asked me not to give out any information. You'll have to get it from them. Say, are you the reporter who wrote that eye-witness story in today's *Blade*?"

"Yes."

"Nice story. And swell publicity for Yolanda. Too bad she's on the dotted line for three more weeks at El Madhouse or I could get her on for bigger dough."

"She'll be back dancing in less than three weeks then?"

"Off the record, nearer three days. It was just a nick."

"Could I drop around and talk to you, Mr. Greene? At your office."

"What about? The police told me not to talk to reporters."

"Not even pass the time of day if you met one on the street? I never saw an agent yet that wouldn't talk to reporters. Maybe I even want to give some of your other clients publicity and what could the cops find wrong with that? Or have they got something on you?"

Greene chuckled. "I wouldn't invite you here if the cops say no. But I'm leaving the office in about twenty minutes and I generally have a drink at one of the places I book. I have an idea that today I might stop in El Madhouse on my way north. In that case I'd be there in a little over half an hour. If you should happen to drop in—"

"I might just happen to," Sweeney said. "Thanks. Off the record, I take it Miss Lang still *is* at Michael Reese?"

"Yes. But you won't be able to see her there."

"Won't try it then," Sweeney said. "So long."

HE HUNG UP the receiver and wiped the sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief. He went back into his room and sat very quietly for five minutes or so.

When he thought he could make it, he pushed himself up out of the chair and left.

The sun was very hot and he walked slowly. On State Street, he stopped in a florist's shop and ordered two dozen American Beauties sent to Yolanda Lang at the hospital. After that he kept plodding steadily through the bright heat until he reached El Madhouse, on Clark near Grand.

He walked from the blazing heat into the cool dimness of the outer bar, separated from the room with tables and the stage, where a cover charge topped higher prices. He blinked, and looked along the bar.

Only three persons sat there. At the far end, a badly intoxicated man drooled over a too-sober blowzy blonde. Half a dozen stools away, a man sat alone, staring at his reflection in the dim blue mirror back of the bar. Sweeney slid onto a stool at the end of the bar. The bartender came over.

"Greene been in?" Sweeney asked. "Doc Greene?"

"Not yet today." The bartender rubbed the clean bar with a dirty towel. "Sometimes comes in around this time, but today I dunno. With Yo in the hospital—"

"Yo," said Sweeney meditatively. "I like that. Gives everybody a southern accent. People turn to her at the bar and ask 'And what's Yo having to drink,' huh?"

"A good question," said the bartender. "What *is* yo having to drink?"

"Well," said Sweeney and thought it over. "Beer with an egg in it, I guess."

The bartender moved away to get it and Sweeney heard the door behind him open. He looked around.

A moon-faced man stood just inside the doorway. A wide but meaningless smile was on his face as he looked along the bar, starting at the far end. His eyes, through round thick-lensed glasses came to rest on Sweeney and through the lenses, looked monstrous.

Sweeney—the outside of Sweeney—didn't move, but something shuddered inside him. For almost the first time in his life he was hating a man at first sight. And fearing him a little too.

"Mr. Sweeney?" said the moon-faced man, more as a statement than a question.

Sweeney said, "Sit down, Doc."

He put his hands in his pockets, quickly, because he had a hunch the shakes were going to come back.

CHAPTER IV

THE moon-faced man slid onto the stool around the turn of the bar from Sweeney, so the two of them faced one another. He said, "That was an excellent story you wrote about — what happened last night to my client, Yolanda Lang, Mr. Sweeney."

Sweeney said, "I'm glad you liked it."

"I didn't say that I liked it," Greene said. "I said it was an excellent story. That is something else again."

"But definitely," said Sweeney. "In this particular case wherein lies the difference?"

Doc Greene leaned his elbows on the bar and laced pudgy fingers together. He said, judiciously, "A man, Mr. Sweeney, might enjoy a voluptuous description of a woman. In other cases he might not enjoy reading it. For example, if the woman was his wife."

"Is Yolanda Lang your wife?"

"No," said the moon-faced man. "I was merely, you will recall, giving that as an example. You've ordered something?"

Sweeney nodded, and Greene looked at the bartender and held up one finger. The man came with Sweeney's beer-and-egg and put a shot glass in front of Greene.

Greene's smile had gone away; now it came back, and he lifted his shot glass. "To your bad health, Mr. Sweeney."

Sweeney's fingers had closed around his own glass. He said, "To yours, Doc," and his hand was steady as he lifted the glass and took a sip. He put it back down and took his other hand out of his pocket. The shakes were gone.

He said, carefully, "Perhaps you would like to cause my health to deteriorate, Doc. If you want to try it would be a pleasure to oblige."

The moon-faced man's smile got wider. "Of course not, Mr. Sweeney. When I became a man I put away childish things, as the great bard says."

"The Bible," said Sweeney. "Not Shakespeare."

"Thank you, Mr. Sweeney. You are, as I feared when I read that story under your by-line, an intelligent man. And, as I guessed from your name, a stubborn Irishman. If I told you to—let us descend to the vernacular—if I told you to lay off Yolanda it would just make you that much more stubborn."

He held up a finger for a refill of the shot glass. He said, "A threat of any sort would be silly. It would be equally useless to point out to you the futility of your trying to make my—ah—client. As you may have—indeed as you *did*—notice Yolanda is not unattractive. It has been tried by experts."

"You flatter yourself, Doc."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. We aren't discussing my relations with Yolanda."

Sweeney took another sip of his drink. He said, "It occurs to me to wonder. Just what *are* we discussing? I take it that you didn't meet me here to discuss publicity for any of your other—ah—clients. So why did you come here?"

"To meet you, Mr. Sweeney. The moment I read that story of yours I knew —I am something of a psychiatrist— that you were going to a thorn in my side. So might Dante have written of Beatrice, so might Abelard have written of Heloise."

"And so," said Sweeney, "might Casanova have written of Guinevere, had they lived in the same century and had he ever seen her with her panties off." He grinned. "You know, Doc, I hate you so damn much I'm beginning to like you."

"Thank you," said Greene. "I feel the same about you. Each of us admires the other's capabilities, let us say. Or you will admire mine when you get to know me better. As, I fear, you shall."

"Already," said Sweeney, "I admire your line of patter. Immensely. The only thing I hate about you is your guts."

"And may the Ripper never expose them to the public gaze," Greene said. "Isn't civilization a marvelous thing, Mr. Sweeney? That two men can sit like this and insult one another, amiably but sincerely, and enjoy the conversation? A century or two ago, one of us would have struck the other across the face with the back of a hand minutes ago, and one of us would die before the sun rose very far above tomorrow's horizon."

"A beautiful thought, Doc," Sweeney said. "I'd love it. But the authorities are fussy about such things. Back to Yolanda. Suppose you read correctly between the lines of my story. What are

you going to do about it? Anything?"

"Of course. For one thing, I shall put every possible pitfall in your path. I shall warn Yolanda against you—not obviously, of course, but subtly. I'll make her think you're a fool. You are, you know."

"Yes," said Sweeney. "But she may discount the information, since it comes from a bastard. You are one, you know."

"Your intuition surprises me, Mr. Sweeney. As it happens, I really am in the literal sense of the word. Quite possibly in the figurative sense also but that is irrelevant. I, myself, made me what I am today."

"Only you could have done it," Sweeney said.

"You gratify me. I didn't expect a compliment. But that was a digression. In addition to putting pitfalls in your path, I am going to help you."

SWEENEY said, "Now you have me really worried."

The moon-faced man said, "You intend to find the Ripper. It's natural that you'll try, first because you're a reporter, but second and more important—to you—you think it will give you an in with Yolanda. Also you think that if you *do* find the Ripper, you'll be a conquering hero and she'll fall into your arms in gratitude. Am I correct?"

"Keep talking," Sweeney said. "As if I need to suggest it."

"So. You've got two reasons for finding him. I've got two reasons for helping you. One"—he held up a fat finger—"if you do find him, he might stick a knife in you. I think I'd like that."

"Thank you kindly."

"Two"—another finger joined the first—"the police just might have something in thinking the killer will come back to finish the job on Yolanda. That I would *not* like."

"That I can understand," Sweeney said. "Also I like it better than your first reason."

"And I don't think, Mr. Sweeney, finding him will get you to first base with Yolanda. At least, I'll take a chance on that."

"Fine, Doc. One little thing, though. The police force of Chicago outnumbers me considerably. Just out of curiosity, what makes you think that I, with my little sling-shot, might do more than the whole blue army?"

"Because you're a crazy damn Irishman. Because you're a little *fey*. I suspected that from a sentence or two in your story and I know it now. Because God loves fools and drunkards and you're both.

"Also because, under the sodden surface, you've got a keen brain, Mr. Sweeney—another thing I suspected before and know now. And you've got a crazy warped streak in you that might take you places where the police wouldn't think to go.

"I really *am* a psychiatrist, Mr. Sweeney, although not a practising one. An unfortunate occurrence in what would have been my last year of internship got me kicked out on my ear. It occurred to me that satyriasis might be a logical prescription for nymphomania.

"We had a patient who was quite an advanced satyr, Mr. Sweeney, and I took the liberty of introducing him into the room of an enthusiastic nympholept and leaving them together for an extended period. My superiors were quite stuffy about it."

"I can understand that," Sweeney said.

"Ah, had they only known some of the other experiments I tried, which were *not* found out. But we digress."

"We do indeed," said Sweeney. "So you're going to help me find the Ripper. So go ahead and help."

Greene spread his hands. "It isn't much. I didn't mean that I have the killer's name and address in my notebook, ready to turn over to you. I merely meant that I'll gladly work with you, Mr. Sweeney. I'll give you such facts and data as I have. And, since you'll want to talk to Yolanda, I'll see that you do. You might have trouble doing even that, with the police on guard around her, as they will be."

He looked at his wrist watch. "Unfortunately, I haven't more time now. A business appointment. One must eat. Could you meet me here tomorrow afternoon about this same time?"

Sweeney frowned. He said, "I don't know. Maybe you're just wasting my time. Have you really got anything?"

"I've got Yolanda," Greene said. "She'll be released from the hospital by then. I'll bring her here with me. You'll be here, of course?"

"I'll be here, of course," said Sweeney.

"Good. We may be seeing quite a bit of one another. Let us, then, dispense with the amenities. Let us not say hypocritical goodbyes. My two drinks were on you. Thank you for them and the hell with you."

He walked out.

Sweeney took a deep breath. He let it out slowly.

The bartender strolled over. He said, "That'll be a dollar and a quarter. Don't you want your beer?"

"No. Pour it down the drain. But bring me a bromo and a short."

"Sure. Mixed?"

"Not mixed."

HE put two dollar bills on the bar. When the bartender came back Sweeney said, "Quite a character, that Doc Greene."

"Yeah. Quite a character."

"What puzzles me about him is this," Sweeney said. "Those seemed to be his own teeth he was wearing. How could a guy like that keep his own teeth that long?"

The bartender chuckled. "Maybe it's them eyes of his. Like a hypnotist. *I'd* rather not tangle with him. Funny, though, the way women go for him. You wouldn't think it."

"Including Yo?" Sweeney asked.

"I wouldn't know about Yo. She's a funny dame to figure out." He took Sweeney's bills and rang up a dollar eighty, putting two dimes on the bar.

Sweeney added a quarter to it and said, "Have one with me."

"Sure. Thanks."

"Skoal," said Sweeney. "Say, who's running El Madhouse now. Is it still Harry Yahn's?"

"Yahn owns it, or most of it, but he isn't running it. He's got another place over on Randolph."

"Sucker joint, like El Madhouse?"

The bartender smiled faintly. "Not this kind of sucker joint."

"Oh," said Sweeney. "It'd be a little bar with a big back room and if you know a guy named Joe at the door you can leave your shirt in the back room."

The blowzy blonde at the far end of the bar was tapping the bottom of her glass on the wood impatiently. The bartender said, "The guy at the door is named Willie." He went down to mix a drink for the blonde.

Sweeney poured the bromo back and forth between the two glasses and drank it.

Then he got up and went out into gathering dusk on Clark Street. He walked south, toward the Loop. He walked slowly, aimlessly, trying to think and not quite succeeding. This stage of recovery he knew well. His mind was fuzzy, his thoughts were ghosts that walked in thick fog. But his physical senses were almost blindingly vivid.

The one drink he'd taken back at El Madhouse bar hadn't brought any desire for another one to keep it company. It hadn't either cleared his mind or fogged it further. It hadn't even tasted good, or bad.

The bridge, when he reached it, was better. There was a cool breeze across it; he stood looking out over the river and letting the breeze blow into his face.

When he turned back an empty taxi was coming. Sweeney hailed it, and gave his home address.

In his room, he slid the bottom newspaper out from under the stack on the bed and sat down in the morris chair. He found the story of the first murder —the murder of the ex-chorine, Lola Brent. Six inches on page two, not much in the way of detail.

There hadn't been a Ripper, then. It was just a story of a woman—a not very important woman, at that—who had been found dead in the areaway between two buildings on Thirty-eighth Street.

A knife or a razor had been the weapon used. The crime had occurred in daylight, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. There had been no witnesses. A child returning home from a playground had discovered the body. Police were seeking a man with whom Lola Brent was alleged to have been living.

Sweeney took up the next paper. The story had a little better play in that one and there were two pictures. One was of Lola Brent. She was a blond and beautiful. She didn't look the thirty-five years the story said she was. You'd have taken her for early twenties.

THE other picture was that of the man the police had arrested, Sammy Cole. He had black curly hair and a face that was handsome in the ruggedly honest way that is a con-man's stock in trade. He denied killing Lola Brent,

and was being held on an open charge.

The following day's story was a brief rehash; the only new angle was that Sammy Cole had confessed to several counts of operating a confidence game. The following several pages brought out nothing additional. The Lola Brent crime had then, it appeared, faded into limbo, unsolved.

He picked up the paper of ten days before and skimmed rapidly through the story of the murder of Stella Gaylord, the B-girl from Madison Street. He didn't try to memorize details here. He was going to concentrate on one crime at a time. He was looking, now, only for further mention of the killing of Lola Brent.

He found it on the second day after the Stella Gaylord murder. It was then first suggested that the crime might be a psychopathic one, perpetrated by the same killer who had slashed Lola Brent six and a half weeks before.

The next day's lead was a build-up of that idea, with a comparative description of the wounds inflicted upon the two women. Each had been killed by a horizontal slash across the abdomen but the weapon had not been the same one.

Sweeney skimmed through the rest of the papers. Apparently no further discoveries of importance had been made on the Brent case. The police were still not too sure that the killer of Lola Brent was the same homicidal maniac who had killed Stella Gaylord and, five days later, Dorothy Lee. But there wasn't any doubt about the latter two having been killed by the same hand.

Sweeney went to the phone in the hall and dialed a number. When he got the man he wanted he asked, "Sammy Cole, the guy that Lola Brent was living with, still in the jug here in Chicago?"

"Yeah," said the man to whom Sweeney was talking. "We're still holding him. We could have salted him away before this but returns are still coming in. Every once in a while we tie him in to a fraud charge and get it off the books."

"I'd like to talk to him," Sweeney said. "Tonight."

"Tonight? Look, Sweeney, can't you wait till regular hours tomorrow? It's after seven o'clock and—"

"You can fix it," Sweeney said. "I'll grab a taxi and be there quick."

Within half an hour Sweeney was sitting on the warden's desk and Sammy Cole on a straight chair a few feet away from him. They were alone in the office.

"I told 'em," Sammy Cole said. "I told 'em every goddam thing. I spilled my guts because *I'd* like to see whoever bumped Lola off take the hot squat. There was the off chance it did tie in with something she'd been doing, see? So I spilled my guts and what does it get me? Enough raps so when I get out, *if* I get out, I'll be peddling pencils."

"Tough," Sweeney said. An envelope and a pencil came out of his pockets and he wrote "Want a drink?" on the back of the envelope and showed it to Sammy

"Lord!" said Sammy Cole, not at all irreverently. It would have been ambiguous to anyone listening in on a bug but Sweeney took the half-pint bottle, still two-thirds full, that he'd bought earlier at the drugstore out of his hip pocket and handed it to Sammy Cole. Sammy Cole handed it back empty and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

He said, "What you want to know?"

"I don't know," Sweeney told him. "That's the trouble—I don't know. But I got to start somewhere. When'd you see Lola last?"

"That morning—almost noon, I guess—when she went to work."

"To work? Were you that far down, Sammy?"

"Well—yeah and no. I was working on something that would have got us Florida for the winter and a real stake. Laugh it off, but I was going to turn straight. For Lola. She didn't like the grifts. So she was keeping us eating while my deal came through."

"Was she tied in on the big deal?"

"No. That was strictly me. But we worked out a little racket for her that brought in peanuts. A hundred or so a week for a few days' work. That's what she was on that day."

"Where? What was it?"

COLE wiped his lips again and bent sidewise to look questioningly in the direction of Sweeney's hip pocket. Sweeney shook his head and spread his hands.

Sammy Cole sighed. He said, "A gift shop on Division Street. Raoul's Gift Shop. That was her first day there, so I dunno much about it except what she told me, from applying for the job the day before, and what little I saw when

I dropped in at six. That was part of the racket. This Raoul is a faggot."

"How would that tie in with a racket for Lola, Sammy? Unless you came in later?"

"Naw, nothing like that. I just mentioned it. All there was to the racket was Lola'd get a job selling stuff somewhere, preferably a place where she'd make a few big sales, not dime store stuff. Small store, usually, where she'd be alone when the boss went out to eat or something and left her alone a little.

"She'd drag down on some sales—ten bucks, fifty bucks, whatever the traffic would bear. We played extra safe because she wasn't on the blotter and I wanted to keep her off. I'd drop in later at a time we'd set and she'd slip me the moolah.

"She never had it on her for more'n a few minutes. She'd stash it somewhere after she dragged it down and get it just a minute before I was due to come in. It was safe as houses. Soon as she saw a mooch beginning to look suspicious at her she'd do a tadeout—never worked anywhere longer'n a few days. Then she'd lay off a while and—well, you got the picture."

Sweeney nodded. "And she got the job at Raoul's the day before. How?"

"Newspaper ad. We had good references for her. That was my department. Job was in the morning papers. She got it in the afternoon and was to start at noon the next day. They're open till nine in the evening and she was to work noon to nine, lunch hour four to five."

"How come you didn't just arrange to meet her outside, during lunch hour?"

Sammy Cole looked at Sweeney contemptuously. "Lookit the angles," he said. "First, she'd have to walk out with the moolah *on* her and that's taking a chance. Second, if he sends her out four to five, then the pansy's taking off at five probably.

"Her best time to do a little business on her own would be from five to six and I get there at six. If the pansy's still gone, good. If he's there she can still slip it to me. I buy something for two bits and she slips the dough in the paper bag with it. It's safe as houses."

"And you got there at six?"

"Sure. She wasn't there and I figured something was on the off beat. I phoned the flat and a cop answered so I hung up quick and stayed away. Not that I guessed what had happened—whatever the hell *did* happen. But I figured she'd got caught on a larceny rap and I'd be better off on the outside, to try to get her out of it. I was nuts about the dame. And they still think maybe *I* killed her."

"When'd you find out what really happened?"

"Morning papers. I'd holed in a hotel. I near went nuts. All I could think about was getting the son that did it and chopping him up into hamburger, slow. But I don't know how to go looking for him without walking into cops and I wasn't going to be able to do a thing if I did that.

"So all I could figure was to keep under cover till the heat was off. But I guess I was too upset to be careful enough. They got me, and by the time I get outa here the guy'll be dead of old age."

Sammy Cole slumped in the chair and sighed. He looked up and asked, "Got a fag?"

Sweeney handed him a package of cigarettes and a book of matches and said, "Keep them. Look, Sammy, if you hadn't been picked up, what would you have done when the heat was off? Where'd you have started?"

"With the faggot—Raoul. Maybe he had something to do with it and maybe he didn't, but I'd have picked his petals off one at a time till I was sure."

"What happened at the gift shop? Did he catch her dragging down on a sale or what? He must have fired her if she went home and she was found in the areaway outside your flat."

Sammy Cole said, "That I wouldn't know. The cops ask me questions; they don't tell me. All I know is what's in the papers and they don't give me any papers. You can get papers—and stuff—in stir, if you got money. But I'm broke flat."

Sweeney nodded and took a ten-dollar bill out of his wallet and handed it across. He said, "You get no dough out of me, pal, if you were hinting. Say, would Lola maybe have put the bite on some merchandise? Rings or something? Some gift shops have lots of small stuff that's valuable."

Sammy Cole shook his head definitely. He said, "That I'll guarantee. She didn't. I drummed that into her. Too many angles, too easy to get caught, too easy to have stuff traced back to you, too

hard to get more'n a twentieth of what the stuff's worth anyway. Not even a ring or a pair of earrings for herself. I drummed that into her."

"What was the long-con you were working on? Could that have tied in?"

"Nope, it couldn't. I didn't spill that because I was working *with* a guy and I wouldn't rat on him. The cops couldn't rubber-hose it out of me because I'm no stoolie. And anyway it *couldn't* have tied in with wha happened to Lola because neither the guy I was working with or the guy we were working *on* knew her or knew she was alive. And she didn't know them or much about them. I mean, I'd told her what the game was but not the details or the names. See?"

"Okay, Sammy. Thanks," Sweeney said. "I can't do you any good, I guess, but I'll keep you posted. So long."

He surprised the con-man by shaking hands with him and went out of the warden's office, nodding to the turnkey who'd been standing outside the door.

CHAPTER V

SWEENEY stood looking into the window of Raoul's gift shop. Two customers, both women, were within.

Sweeney studied the window and saw that it was not, in the fashion of many gift shops, cluttered with junky bric-a-brac and cheap miscellany. The items displayed were few, and good. There were foo dogs from China, thunderbirds from Mexico, costume jewelry that was in good taste if a bit blatant, a pair of brass candlesticks of exquisitely simple design. His opinion of Raoul went up several notches.

One of the women inside made a purchase and came out. The other was obviously browsing and Raoul, after apparently offering to help her, relaxed gracefully against the counter.

Sweeney went inside. The proprietor, smiling a proprietary smile, came forward to meet him. The smile turned to a slight frown when Sweeney said, "From the *Blade*. Like to talk to you about Lola Brent," but he walked with Sweeney to the back of the shop.

Sweeney asked, "She got the job when? The day before?"

"Yes. Several came in answer to an advertisement I put in the paper. Your paper, the *Blade*. She had excellent references from a gift shop in New York. I didn't guess they were fraudulent. She was well dressed, had a pleasing personality. And she was free, ready to start work at once. I told her to come in the next day."

"And she did, at noon?"

"Yes."

"And what happened? You caught her dragging down on a sale and fired her?"

"Not exactly. I explained it all to the police."

Sweeney said, "I could get it direct from them but I'd rather not."

Raoul sighed. He said, "From twelve until a little after three we were both in the store. There weren't many customers and I spent most of the time acquainting her with the stock, telling her things she should know about the business. At about a quarter after three I had to leave for a short while, on a personal matter. I was gone a little over half an hour.

"When I returned I asked what business she'd done while I was gone and she told me that only one customer had been in the store and that he had bought a pair of six-dollar bookends. That was the only amount that had been rung up on the register. But then I noticed that something else was missing."

"What was it?"

"A figurine, a statuette, which had been priced at twenty-four dollars. It had stood on the shelf over there." Raoul pointed. "Shortly after my return I chanced to notice that it was no longer there. There had been three figures on that shelf and now there were only two, with the two moved closer together to avert leaving a conspicuous gap between them. So I asked Miss Brent if she had moved the statuette and she denied knowledge of it."

HE SIGHED gently. "It was embarrassing, of course. I knew she could not be telling the truth because—just as it happened—I was certain it had been there when I left."

"It couldn't have been shoplifted?"

"Hardly possible. The figure was ten inches high and, although slender, the arms were extended forward. It would have been a difficult object to conceal un-

der a coat and it would not have gone into a pocket at all. It was not the sort of object that is chosen by shoplifters, I assure you. Besides, Miss Brent had told me that only one person had been in the store. There was no doubt in my mind at all, Mr. ——"

"Sweeney. You accused her of having sold it and kept the dough?"

"What else could I do? I told her that I had no desire to prosecute and that if she would permit me to search her thoroughly back in the stock room I would permit her to go, without calling the police."

"You found the money on her?"

"No. When she saw that I really meant to call the police unless she confessed and really meant to let her go if she did she admitted the theft. She had the money, a twenty-dollar bill and four ones, in the top of her stocking. A woman's repository."

"Then you didn't have to search her. Or did you?"

"Of course I did. I had missed that particular item and she had confessed selling it but—since she was admittedly dishonest—how did I know that that was the only item she had sold besides the bookends? I couldn't inventory the stock. She might also have made, let us say, a fifty-dollar sale of costume jewelry and concealed the money in her other stocking or in her brassiere or somewhere."

"Had she?"

"No. At least I found no money except a few dollars in her purse which I was willing to believe was her own property. She was—ah—a little sullen about being searched, but she was reasonable when she saw my reason for insisting. Also she was not sufficiently naive to think that I wished to do so for any ulterior motive, if you understand what I mean."

"I understand what you mean," said Sweeney. "So it would have been about four o'clock when she left?"

"Yes. Not later than fifteen minutes after four. I did not notice the time exactly."

"She left alone?"

"Of course. And to anticipate your next question, I did not notice whether she met anyone outside. Naturally, knowing her to be dishonest, I kept my eyes on her as far as the door but not beyond.

"She must have gone directly to her home, because I understand she was found dead in the areaway there at five o'clock. She would have had to transfer to get there, and go through the Loop; it would have taken at least half an hour from here, possibly longer."

"Unless she took a cab or someone gave her a lift."

"Of course. The taxi is not too likely, judging from the small amount of money she had in her purse."

Sweeney nodded. "Being picked up isn't likely either. Her man was to meet her here in the store at six but he'd hardly have been around the neighborhood as early as four-fifteen."

Raoul's eyebrows rose a little. "He was to meet her here?"

"Yeah. To pick up whatever she'd dragged down by then."

"Indeed? The police didn't tell me that."

Sweeney grinned. "The police don't go out of their way to tell people things. That's why I wanted to talk to you about this instead of to them. Did Lola Brent, by the way, seem to recognize anybody who did come in that afternoon, while you were here?"

"No. I'm reasonably sure she didn't."

"What was the statuette? A woman's figure, I take it, but with or without clothes?"

"Without. Very definitely without if you understand what I mean."

"I guess I do," Sweeney said. "Even some women, let alone statues, manage to be nakeder without clothes than others do. It's a gift."

Raoul raised his hands expressively. "I do not mean to imply, Mr. Sweeney, that the statuette was in any sense of the word pornographic or suggestive. It was, rather, quite virginal—in a very peculiar way."

"You intrigue me," said Sweeney. "How many ways of being virginal are there?"

RAOUL smiled. "There are many ways of expressing a single quality. Of, as it were, getting it across. Virginity, in this case, is expressed through fear, horror, loathing.

"Would you care to *see* the statuette? Not the one Miss Brent sold, of course, but a duplicate of it. I ordered two and liked them so well that I have one in my apartment in the next block. It's closing time now and—I assure you I have *no*

ulterior motive, Mr. Sweeney.

"Thanks," said Sweeney. "But I don't believe it's necessary. The statuette itself could hardly have anything to do with the crime."

"Of course not. I merely thought it would interest you abstractly." He smiled. "It is, incidentally, known as a Screaming Mimi."

"A what?"

"A Screaming Mimi. Girl's name—M-i-m-i. A rather obvious pun, of course, on the screaming meemies, if you know what they are."

"Intimately," said Sweeney. "And, if I may, I'm going to change my mind. I *would* like to meet this Mimi, Mr. — Is Raoul your last name?"

"Reynarde, Mr. Sweeney, Raoul Reynarde. If you'll pardon me just a moment—"

He walked over to the remaining customer to tell her it was closing time. Sweeney followed her to the door and waited there until Reynarde had turned out the lights. They walked a block and a half east on Division Street and up two flights of stairs to the apartment.

"I can't ask you to stay long, Mr. Sweeney," Reynarde said, as he flicked on the light inside the door. "I—ah—have a guest coming. But we'll have time for a drink. May I make you a highball?"

"Sure, thanks," said Sweeney. "But where is Mimi?"

"On the mantel yonder."

Sweeney's gaze, which had been roaming about the beautifully furnished—if a bit feminine—apartment, came to rest on a ten-inch-high statuette over the fireplace. He crossed the room and stood looking at it.

He saw now what Reynarde had meant. Definitely there was virginal quality about the slim nude figure, but that you saw afterward. "Fear, horror, loathing," Reynarde had said and all of that was there, not only in the face but in the twisted rigidity of the body. The mouth was wide open in a soundless scream and you got the impression that it really *was* soundless, that the girl was too utterly frightened to find her voice. The arms were thrust out, palms forward, to hold off some approaching horror.

"An exquisite thing," said Reynarde's voice from across the room, where he poured drinks at a little mahogany cabinet. "It is made of a new plastic that can't be told from ebony, unless you pick it up. If that figure were an original it would be worth a lot of money." He waved a hand around the room. "Most things you see here *are* originals. I prefer them."

Sweeney grunted. "I don't agree with you there. I'd rather any day have a Van Gogh print than an art school original. Could you get me one of these?"

Reynarde's voice came from just behind Sweeney. "Your drink, Mr. Sweeney. Yes, I can get you a Screaming Mimi or I think I can. The company that makes them—a small concern in Louisville, Kentucky, of all places—may possibly have some left. They generally make a few hundred of an item like that. But if you really want it I may sell you that one. I think I am growing a little weary of Mimi by now. Your health, sir."

SWEENEY drank absent-mindedly without taking his eyes off the statuette, emptying the glass at a single draught. He said, "Before you change your mind, Mr. Reynarde—" He put his glass down on the mantel and counted twenty-four dollars out of his wallet.

"How," he asked, "did it get named? Is that your name for it, or the company's?"

Reynarde pursed his lips. "I don't believe I re— Oh, yes. The name came from from the company that made it, but unofficially as it were. The salesman told me that the catalogue code number for it is SM-One, and someone in their office with a sense of humor decided the SM stood for Screaming Mimi."

"Who did the statuette? The original, I mean."

"That I do not know. The company is the Ganslen Art Company. They make mostly bookends and chess sets but they do some work in small statuary, often surprisingly good at the price. Shall I wrap the figure for you?"

Sweeney chuckled. "Put pants on Mimi? Never. I'll carry her naked through the streets."

"Another drink, Mr. Sweeney?"

"Thanks, no. I think Mimi and I must be going." He picked up the statuette gently.

Reynarde said, "Sit down, Mr. Sweeney," and himself sank into an overstuffed chair, although Sweeney remained standing. He said, "Something

interests me, Mr. Sweeney, despite the fact that it is none of my business at all. Are you a sadist?"

"Me?"

"You. I am curious because of the appeal that statuette has for you. The thing is an orgy of masochism. It would appeal, in my opinion, only to a sadist."

Sweeney looked at him thoughtfully. He said, "No, I'm not a sadist. I can see your point about the appeal of the figure. I don't know the answer. The instant I saw it, I knew that I wanted to own it but I haven't the slightest idea why."

As the door closed behind him Sweeney wondered why he had wanted the statuette. And why, in particular, he had resented Raoul Reynarde's probing into his reason for wanting it. He looked at the statuette in his hand, and shivered a little—mentally if not physically. Was he punch-drunk?

No, he wasn't. The fog inside his head was lifting definitely. And through the fog he almost had a glimpse of something that might have been the association Reynarde had suggested. Then the fog came down again.

Well, it would come back. Sweeney sighed and started for the stairway. Coming up the stairs was a plump, beautiful young man with blond curly hair.

Outside, and the dark night bright with lights, the air hot and humid. Sweeney walked west on Division Street and then south on Dearborn.

He wondered how long he could keep going like this—how long he would have to keep going before he could eat and then sleep. The nausea was back with him now. Food was a disgusting thought but it was a hurdle to be taken, a hurdle that *had* to be taken.

Eventually.

AT CHICAGO AVENUE he turned half a block west and went into a small clean restaurant and sat down at the counter. A man in a white apron that made Sweeney think of a surgeon came up on the other side of the counter and stood there.

He stood there staring at the black statuette Sweeney had placed on the counter in front of him.

"Mimi," Sweeney said, "meet Joe. Joe, meet Mimi. Or *is* your name Joe, Joe?"

The counterman grinned uncertainly. He said, "It's close. Jack. What's wrong with the little lady?"

"She is screaming," Sweeney said. He felt as though he wanted to, himself. "Jack, could you get me a very special dinner?"

"Such as what? If we got what it takes, we can make it."

"Bread," said Sweeney. "Two slices of white bread, plain, without butter. Not too fresh, but not really stale. With the crusts left on. On a white plate. I think maybe I could eat that. The bread, I mean, not the plate. Can you do it?"

"I'll ask the cook. Coffee, too?"

"Black," said Sweeney. "In a cup."

He took a sip of the scalding coffee and then began to nibble on one of the slices of bread. It was all right; it would go down and stay down.

He was almost through with the second slice when the waiter came back. He stood leaning against the ledge, looking at the statuette. He said, "That thing sort of *gets* you, when you look at it. It gives you the willies. Where'd you get it?"

"From a fairy," Sweeney said. "How much do I owe you?"

"About fifteen cents. Say, know what that statue makes me think of? The Ripper."

SWEENEY almost dropped his cup of coffee. He put it down carefully.

The waiter hadn't noticed. He said, "I mean, a woman being attacked by the Ripper. No dame is that afraid of being raped or something. But a crazy guy with a knife in his hand coming after her—and she's backed in a corner may be—"

Sweeney got up slowly. He fumbled a five-dollar bill out of his wallet and put it down on the counter. He said, "Keep the change, Jack."

He grabbed Mimi firmly about the waist and went out.

The fog was gone. He knew now what his hunch had been and why he'd wanted the Screaming Mimi. An hour or two before she'd been killed, Lola Brent had sold a Screaming Mimi. The fact that she'd dragged down on the sale had nothing to do with her death, but the fact that she'd *made* that sale had. The purchaser had been an insane sadist who had waited outside and followed her home.

CHAPTER VI

IN the morning, it was Friday. It was almost Friday noon. Sweeney awoke and lay a while in bed, and then swung his feet out onto the floor and sat there a while.

On top of the radiophono, or the half that didn't lift up, stood a little ten-inch-high black statuette. It was the figure of a naked girl, her arms thrust out to ward off a ripper, her mouth open in a silent, eternal scream. Only a sadist could have liked it. Sweeney wasn't one; he shuddered a little and averted his eyes.

But it woke him up, seeing the Screaming Mimi. It woke him up to nightmare.

He stood up, making an unconscious gesture of pushing back the heat and the fog, and got a bathrobe out of the closet. He went down the hall to the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub while it filled with cool water. Almost cold water.

He took a deep breath and sank down into it, clear to his neck, letting the coldness of it draw the heat from his body and feeling the mist clear from his mind.

Warmth, he thought, is what man wants, what he lives for, what he works for, until he gets too much of it—and then coldness is a wonderful and refreshing thing. The thought of lying in an ever-cold grave, for instance, is a horrible thing in winter. In summer—

But that was maudlin. Like thinking of Lola Brent, the ex-chorine who had loved a con-man so much she'd taken to the grift herself to help him. And she'd sold a small black statuette to a man who'd looked from it to her—

Sweeney swore. What did it matter, to him, that a fading ex-pony was six feet under, now? She'd have been there sooner or later anyway. A murderer never really kills. He but anticipates.

Actually, he never hurts the one he kills. The hurt is to whoever loved him or her, and has to keep on living. The man who'd killed Lola Brent had hurt Sammy Cole more than he'd hurt Lola.

If he, Sweeney, really came to hate Doc Greene and wanted to hurt him badly—

But no, that was silly. Sure, someone could have hated Doc Greene enough to want to get at him by killing Yolanda—but that left the other murders out of it—Lola Brent, Stella Gaylord, Dorothy Lee.

Besides, it left out sadism and Mimi, and the Screaming Mimi was the key.

He didn't put his shoulders back down into the water. He got out of the tub instead and toweled himself off and went back to his room. He put on a pair of shorts and a pair of sox. That would be enough until he was ready to go out, in that heat.

WHAT was next? Stella Gaylord, B-girl on Madison Street. He might as well take it chronologically. The murder of Lola Brent had been two months ago. The second murder, that of Stella Gaylord, had been ten days ago.

He put the stack of old newspapers on the chair, where he could reach it from the bed, and propped the pillow up against the footboard.

Why not music? he thought. It always helped him concentrate. He studied the shelf of albums, wondering what would go well with the murder of a B-girl. Something vast and mysterious perhaps. His hand hesitated at Sacre du Printemps and moved on. Strauss' Death and Transfiguration? The Pathetique? No, too beautiful but too corny.

His hand went back to Death and Transfiguration. He put the records on and started the machine, then lay down on the bed and picked up the first paper, the one of ten days ago, that broke the Gaylord murder story.

It was on page one but in the bottom right corner, six inches of type under a one-column head. Sweeney read the six inches of type and decided that, as far as really important details were concerned, they might as well have let the headline stand alone.

There was the woman's name and address—on West Madison Street—and the place where the murder had occurred—the mouth of an alley off Huron Street between State and Dearborn. The body had been discovered at three-thirty in the morning and, according to the physician who had examined the body, the woman had been dead less than an hour.

Apparently there had been no robbery committed and the victim had not been attacked. Police suspected that a homi-

cidal maniac was at large, although the Lola Brent murder had apparently been forgotten. It was not mentioned.

The following day's paper had a picture of Stella Gaylord: it was a poor picture, apparently blown up from a snapshot, and you could tell that she was pretty but that was about all. There was more about Stella, too, including the address of the West Madison Street bar where she'd been working on percentage. She had been last seen alive when she'd left there, alone, at two o'clock, an hour and a half before the discovery of her body.

Sweeney got up to shut off the phonograph. The sight of the black statuette on top of it reminded him of something he had to do. He slipped on a bathrobe and went out into the hall to the telephone.

He got a long distance operator and put in a call to the Ganslen Art Company at Louisville. A few minutes later he had the general manager on the line.

"This is the Chicago *Blade*," Sweeney said. "Something about one of your statuettes has come up in connection with a murder investigation. It's an SM-one. Remember it, offhand?"

"I'm afraid I'd have to look it up."

"Maybe this will help. It's a figure of a terrified girl; somebody at your place called it a Screaming Mimi."

"Oh yes, certainly. I remember it now. What do you want to know about it?"

"Could you tell me how many of them you sold—and particularly how many of them you sold in Chicago?"

"We didn't sell many, I know. It didn't turn out to be a popular number at all. In fact, we never got around to listing it in our catalogue. We made a trial lot of one gross and we've got most of them left. If you want to hold the line a minute I can look up how many were sold in Chicago. Or shall I call you back?"

"I'll hold the line," Sweeney said.

IT WAS scarcely a minute before the manager's voice was back. He said, "I've got it all here—luckily we keep a separate record on each number. There were—uh—two sold in Chicago. Only two, both to a place called Raoul's Gift Shop. Altogether we sold about forty of them."

"What will you do with the hundred-odd Mimi's you have left?"

"We'll get rid of them next year, in with mixed lots. If a customer orders, say, a dozen mixed figures, our choice, he gets them about half the usual list price. We get rid of our odd lots and remainders that way. At a loss, of course, to us—but it's better than throwing them away."

"Of course," Sweeney said. "Do you recall who nicknamed SM-one the Screaming Mimi?"

"Our bookkeeper; it's a hobby of his to try to think up names that match the figures and the letter designations—says it helps him remember which is which." The manager chuckled. "He hits well once in a while. I remember our number SF. He called it Some Fanny, and it was."

"I'm tempted to order one," said Sweeney. "But back to Mimi. Who designed her, or sculptured her, or molded her?"

"Fellow by the name of Chapman Wilson. Artist and sculptor, lives in Brampton, Wisconsin. He modeled it in clay."

"And sent it to you?"

"No, I bought it from him there, in Brampton. I do the buying myself, make trips several times a year. I bought SM-one from him about a year ago, and two other numbers. I guessed right on the others—they're selling okay."

"This Chapman Wilson—did he model Mimi from life, or what?"

"Don't know—didn't ask him. The original was in clay, same size as our copies, about ten inches. I took a chance on it because it was unusual. Something unusual may go over really big or it may not sell at all. That's a chance we take."

"Know anything about Chapman Wilson personally?"

"Not much. He's rather an eccentric, but then a lot of artists are."

"Married?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. Didn't ask him, but I didn't see a woman around or any sign of one."

"You say he's eccentric. Could you go as far as psychopathic, maybe?"

"I don't think so. He's a little screwy, but that's all. Most of his stuff is pretty routine—and sells fairly well."

"Thanks a lot," Sweeney said. "Guess that's all I need to know. Goodbye."

He checked the charges on the call so he could settle with Mrs. Randall and went back to his room.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at the black statuette. His

luck had been better than he had hoped —only two Mimis had come to Chicago. He was looking at one of them. And the other—maybe the Ripper was looking at it now.

The luck of the Irish, Sweeney thought. He'd been working on the case a day and had a lead the cops would give their eye teeth for.

He felt swell. He grinned at Mimi. He thought, "We're a jump ahead of the cops, Baby, you and I. All we got to do is find your sister."

The little black statuette screamed soundlessly and Sweeney's grin faded. Somewhere in Chicago another Mimi was screaming like that—and with better cause. A madman with a knife owned her. Someone with, perhaps, a twisted mind and a straight razor.

Someone who wouldn't want to be found by Sweeney.

HE shook himself a little, mentally, to get rid of that thought, and turned to the mirror over the washbowl. He rubbed a hand over his face. Yes, he'd better shave. He'd be meeting Yolanda late in the afternoon if Doc Greene was as good as his word.

He held out his hand and looked at it. Yes, it was steady enough that he could use his straight razor without cutting himself. He lathered his face carefully, then reached for the razor. It wasn't there where it should have been lying.

He bent forward and looked, very carefully and disbelievingly, at the mark in the thin layer of dust, the mark that was just the shape of the razor.

Carefully he wiped the lather off his face with a wetted towel and dressed. He went downstairs. Mrs. Randall's door was ajar and she said, "Come on in, Mr. Sweeney."

He stood in the doorway. "When did you dust in my room last, Mrs. Randall?"

"Why—yesterday morning."

"Do you remember if—" He was going to ask if she remembered seeing the razor and then realized he didn't have to ask that. Whether she remembered or not, that fresh spot in the dust was proof that the razor had been there after the dusting. He changed the question.

"Was anybody in my room yesterday evening, or yesterday afternoon after I left?"

"Why, no. Not that I know of, anyway. I wasn't here yesterday evening. I went to a movie. Is something missing?"

"Not anything valuable," Sweeney said. "I guess I must have taken it while I was drunk, the last time I was here."

He went back up to his room and closed the door. He struck a match and examined the mark in the dust minutely. Yes, there was some dust in the bare patch that was the shape of the closed razor, about half as much as in the surrounding area.

Was anything else missing? He went over to the dresser and opened the top drawer in which he kept small miscellaneous items.

The contents looked intact until he remembered that there'd been a two-bladed penknife in the drawer.

It wasn't there now.

He looked at Mimi, and he knew how she felt.

[*Turn page*]

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CHAPTER VII

THE shining razor hovered above Sweeney's throat. It descended under his chin and scraped gently upward, taking away lather and stubble, leaving a clean, smooth swath. It rose again.

"Take this Ripper business," said the barber. He wiped the razor on a piece of tissue and poised it again. "It's got the whole damn town jittery. It got me pinched last night."

Sweeney grunted interrogatively.

"Carrying a razor. Every once in a while I take a razor home, never thought anything of it.

"Put it in the breast pocket of my suit coat and the top of it shows and damn if a harness bull didn't stop me right on the street and get tough. Said for all anybody knew, the Ripper's a barber, too. But he ain't."

The razor scraped "How do you know?" Sweeney asked.

"Throats. A barber that went nuts would cut throats with it."

Sweeney said. "You got something there. You don't feel like cutting one today, I hope."

"Nope, not today." The barber grinned.

The razor scraped.

"One of the three dames he killed," said the barber, "used to work a block from here. Tavern down on the next corner."

"I know," Sweeney said. "I'm on my way there. Did you know the girl?"

"I seen her in there, enough to place her when I saw her picture in the paper. But I don't go in B-joints very often, not with the money I make."

He put a steaming towel over Sweeney's face and patted it down. He said, "Anyway, I figure the Ripper uses a knife anyway instead of a razor. You *could* use a razor like that, sure, but it'd be too awkward to hold for a long hard slash across the guts like he uses. Haircut?"

"No," said Sweeney. He paid, and went out into the hot August sunlight. He walked a block west to the address that had been given in the newspaper.

The place had a flashy front. Neon tubes, writhing red in the sun's glare, proclaimed that this was Susie's Cue. Hexagonal windows were curtained off to block the view within, but held chaste photographs of unchaste morsels of femininity.

It was cool and dim inside. It was empty of customers. A bartender lounged behind the bar and two girls, one in a bright red dress, the other in white with gold sequins, sat on stools together at the far end of the bar. There were no drinks in front of them. All three looked toward Sweeney as he entered.

He picked a stool in about the middle of the row and put a five-dollar bill on the mahogany. The bartender came over and one of the girls—the one in red—was getting off her stool. The bartender beat her there and Sweeney had time to ask for a rye and seltzer before the girl, now on the stool beside him, said "Hello."

"Hello," Sweeney said. "Lonesome?"

"That's *my* line; I'm supposed to ask that. You'll buy me a drink, won't you?"

SWEENEY nodded. The bartender was already pouring it. He moved away to give them privacy. The girl in the red dress smiled brightly at Sweeney. She said, "I'm awfully glad you came in. It's been dead as a doornail in this joint ever since I got here an hour ago. My name's Tess, so now we're introduced. Let's move over to one of the booths, huh, and Joe'll bring us—"

"Did you know Stella Gaylord?"

Stopped in mid-sentence, she stared at him. She asked, "You aren't another shamus, are you? This place was lousy with 'em, right after what happened to Stella."

"You did know her, then," said Sweeney. "Good. No, I'm not a shamus. I'm a newspaperman."

"Oh. One of those. May I have another drink, please?"

Sweeney nodded and the bartender, who hadn't gone far, came to pour it.

"Tell me about Stella."

"Tell you what?"

"Everything you know. Pretend I never heard of her. For all practical purposes I haven't. I didn't work on the case. I was on vacation when it happened."

"Oh. But you're working on it now?"

Sweeney sighed. He'd have to satisfy

her curiosity before he could satisfy his own. He said, "Not for the paper. I'm going to write it up for a fact detective magazine. Not just Stella Gaylord but the whole Ripper business. As soon as the case is cracked, that is."

"Oh. They pay pretty well for something like that, don't they? What's in it for me?"

"A drink" said Sweeney, motioning to the bartender. "Listen, sister, I'll be talking to about fifty people who knew Stella Gaylord and Dorothy Lee and Lola Brent and to coppers who worked on it and to other reporters. Wouldn't I be in a beautiful spot if I gave everybody a slice of it? Even if the case does break and I do sell the story I'd come out behind, see?"

She grinned. "It never hurts to try."

"That it doesn't. And, incidentally, I *will* split with you if you can crack the case so I can sell it. You don't happen to know who killed her, do you?"

Her face hardened. "Mister, if I knew that, the cops would know it. Stella was a good kid."

"Tell me about her. Anything. How old she was, where she came from, what she wanted, what she looked like—anything."

"I don't know how old she was. Somewhere around thirty, I guess. She came from Des Moines about five years ago. I knew her only about a month."

"Was that when you started here, or when she did?"

"When I did. She'd been here a couple of months already. I was over on Halstead before that. It was a worse joint than this one, but I made better dough. There was always trouble there, though, and I hate trouble."

"About Stella," said Sweeney. "What did she look like? I saw the newspaper picture but it wasn't very good."

"I know. Stella was kind of pretty. She had a beautiful figure anyway. She tried to get into modeling once, but you got to have contacts. She was about thirty. Her hair was kind of darkish blond. Blue eyes. About five-five or so."

"What *was* she, inside?" Sweeney asked. "What was she trying to do?"

THE red dress shrugged. "What are any of us trying to do? Get along, I guess. How'd I know what she was like inside? How's about another drink?"

"Okay," said Sweeney. "Were you working here with her the night she was killed?"

"Yeah. I told the cops what I knew about that."

"Tell me too."

"She made an after-date. After two, that is. We closed at two. It was with a guy that was in around ten or eleven o'clock and talked to her for half an hour or so. I never saw him before, and he hasn't been in since."

"Did he pick her up at two?"

"She was going to meet him somewhere. His hotel, I guess." She turned and looked at Sweeney. "We don't do that with anybody. But sometimes, if we like a guy—well, why not?"

"Why not?" Sweeney said. "And you girls don't make much at this percentage racket, do you?"

"Not enough to dress the way we got to dress. And everything. This ain't a nice racket but there are worse ones. At least we can pick which men we want to go out with and we get ten or twenty propositions a day." She grinned at him impudently. "Not often this early, though. Yours will be the first today when you get around to it."

"*If* I get around to it," Sweeney said. "What do you remember about the guy she was going to meet?"

"Practically nothing. I think he had on a gray suit. He wasn't specially old or young or tall or short or fat or anything or I'd probably have remembered. I don't think I'd know him again if I saw him."

"He didn't have a round face and wear thick glasses, did he?"

"Not that I remember. I wouldn't swear he didn't. And I'll save you one thing. Nobody else around here noticed him or has any better idea. That's one thing the coppers dogged everybody about."

"Did Stella have any enemies?"

"No. She was a nice kid. Even us girls who worked with her liked her and, mister, that's something. And to beat your next question, no, she didn't have any serious men friends and she didn't live with anybody."

"She have a family back in Des Moines?"

"Her parents were dead, she said once. If she had any other relatives anywhere she never talked about them."

"The address on West Madison where she lived. That would be about three blocks from here, wouldn't it? What is

it, a hotel or rooming house?"

"A hotel, the Claremore. It's a dive. Can I have another drink?"

Sweeney crooked a finger at the bartender. He said, "Mine, too, this time."

He shoved his panama back on his head. "Look, Tess, you've told me what she looked like, what she did. But what *was* she? What made her tick? What did she *want?*"

The girl in the red dress picked up her glass and stared into it. She looked at Sweeney, then, squarely for the first time. She said, "You're a funny kind of guy. I think I could like you."

"That's swell," said Sweeney.

"I even like the way you said that. Sarcastic as hell, but—I don't know what I mean. You meet all kinds of guys in a business like this and—" She laughed a little and emptied her glass.

"You're a big girl now," Sweeney said. "Don't let it get you down. I *do* like you."

"Sure. Sure. *I* know what I am. So let's skip it. I'll tell you what Stella wanted. A beauty shop. In a little town somewhere, a long way from Chicago. Go ahead and laugh. But that's what she was saving up her money for."

"She had money saved up then. Who gets it?"

The girl shrugged. "Nobody, I guess, unless some relative shows up. Say, I just remembered something. Stella had a girl friend who's a waitress near where she was killed. An all-night restaurant on State just north of Chicago Avenue. And she nearly always had something to eat after she got off at two."

"You don't know the waitress' name, do you?"

Tess shook her head. "But I know the restaurant. It's the third or fourth door north of Chicago Avenue, on the west side of State."

SWEENEY said "Thanks, Tess. I'd better push along." He glanced at the money on the bar, three singles and some change left out of the ten he'd put there. "Put it under the mattress."

She put a hand on his arm. "Wait. Do you mean it? Will you come back?"

"Maybe."

Tess sighed and dropped her hand. "All right then, you won't. I know. The nice guys never do."

When Sweeney stepped out to the sidewalk the impact of the heat was almost like a blow. He hesitated a moment, then walked west.

The Claremore hotel, from the street, was just a sign and an uninviting stairway. Sweeney trudged up the steps to a tiny lobby on the second floor.

A swarthy, stocky man who hadn't shaved for at least two days was sorting mail behind a short counter. He glanced at Sweeney and said, "Filled up." He looked down at the mail again.

"Stella Gaylord lived here," Sweeney said.

"God, another cop or a reporter. Yeah, she lived here. So what?"

"So nothing," said Sweeney.

He turned and looked down the dim corridor of doors with peeling paint, at the uncarpeted stairs leading to the floor above. He sniffed the musty air. Stella Gaylord, he thought, must have wanted that beauty shop pretty bad to have lived in a hole like this.

The clock in the window of a cheap jewelry store next door told him he still had over an hour before his appointment with Greene and Yolanda Lang at El Madhouse.

It also reminded him that he still didn't have a watch and he went in and bought one.

Putting his change back in his wallet, he asked the jeweler, "Did you know Stella Gaylord?"

"Who?"

"Such is fame," Sweeney said. "Skip it."

Outside he flagged a cab and rode to State and Chicago. The waitress who had been Stella's friend wouldn't be on duty now but maybe he could get her address.

The restaurant was called the Dinner Gong. Two waitresses were working behind the counter and a man in shirt sleeves, who looked as though he might be the proprietor, was behind the cash register on the cigar counter.

Sweeney bought cigarettes. He said, "I'm from the *Blade*. You have a waitress here who was a friend of Stella Gaylord. Is she still on the night shift?"

"You mean Thelma Smith. She quit over a week ago. Scared stiff to work in this neighborhood after what happened to the Gaylord girl."

"You have her address? Thelma's, I mean."

"No. She was going out of town;

that's all I know. She'd been talking about going to New York, so maybe that's where."

Sweeney said, "Stella was in here that night, wasn't she?"

"Sure. I wasn't on then but I was here while the police were talking to Thelma. She said Stella came here a little after two o'clock and had a sandwich and coffee and then left."

"She didn't say anything to Thelma about where she was going?"

The proprietor shook his head. "But it was probably somewhere near here or she wouldn't have come way up here from Madison for a sandwich. She was a chippie. The cops figure she had a hotel-room date somewhere around here after she got through at the bar she worked at."

Sweeney thanked him and went out.

While he was waiting for a chance to get across the traffic on Chicago Avenue, he remembered something he'd forgotten to ask Tess. When he got across the street he phoned Susie's Cue from the corner drugstore and asked for her.

"This is the guy you were talking to half an hour ago, Tess," he told her. "Just remembered something. Did Stella ever say anything about a statuette —a little black statuette of a woman, about ten inches high?"

"No. Where are you?"

"I'm lost in a fog," Sweeney said. "Tess, does 'Screaming Mimi' mean anything to you?"

"I've had 'em. What is this, a gag?"

"No, but I can't tell you about it. Thanks, anyway. I'll be seeing you sometime."

"I'll bet."

CHAPTER VIII

YOLANDA looked just like the picture of her that had been in Sweeney's mind except, of course, that she wore clothes. Sweeney smiled at her and she smiled back and Doc Greene said, "You'll remember her, Sweeney. You've been staring ever since you sat down."

Yolanda said, "Pay no attention to him, Mr. Sweeney. His bark is worse than his bite. He grows on you."

"He'd better not try to grow on *me*. Doc, do you shave with a straight-edge razor?"

"As it happens, yes."

"Your own, or do you borrow other people's?"

Behind the heavy lenses Doc Greene's eyes narrowed slightly. "Someone has borrowed yours?"

Sweeney nodded. "Again your perspicacity mystifies me. Yes, someone has borrowed mine. And a small knife as well. The only two keen-edged tools in the place."

"Not counting your brain, Sweeney. He left you that. Or was it there at the time of the theft?"

"I doubt it seriously. It must have been in the evening while I was out rather than while I was sleeping. I deduce that from the fact that, when I looked in the mirror this morning, there was no fine red line across my throat."

Greene shook his head slowly. "You looked in the wrong place, Sweeney. Our friend the Ripper has a strong predilection for abdomens. Did you look there?"

"Not specifically, Doc. But I think I would have noticed when I took a shower."

Yolanda Lang shuddered a little and pushed her chair back. "I'm afraid I must run along, Mr. Sweeney. I've got to talk to the maestro about a new number. You'll come to see me dance tonight? The first number is at ten."

She walked toward the archway leading from the tavern to the night club at the rear. The dog, which had been lying beside her chair, followed her. So did the two detectives who had been sitting at the next table.

"Makes quite a parade," Doc Greene said.

Sweeney sat down again and made circles on the table with the bottom of his glass. He said, "Hello, Doc. I didn't know you were here."

"Getting anywhere, Sweeney? Got a lead?"

"No."

Greene sighed deeply. "My bosom enemy, I'm afraid you don't trust me."

"Should I?"

"To an extent. And to what extent? To the extent that I tell you you can. That means as far as finding the Ripper is concerned. Right now there are two detectives guarding Yo all the time—

three eight-hour shifts of them. But the police won't do that forever. Find me the Ripper, Sweeney."

"And after that?"

"After that, the hell with you."

"Thank you, Doc. The only trouble is that you're so completely honest that I distrust you."

GREENE sighed again. "Sweeney," he said. "I don't want you to waste time suspecting me. The police got that little idea yesterday because I couldn't account for where I was when the Ripper attacked Yolanda. I don't know where I was either, except that it was on the South Side. I was with a client—a singer at the Club Cairo—until midnight and I got pretty stinking."

"That happens," Sweeney said. "But why should I believe it?"

"For the same reason the police did, you should. Because it happens I have solid alibis on two of the other three attacks. Not on the Lola Brent one, two months ago. That's too far back and I couldn't figure out where I was. But they told me the second one—what was her name?"

"Stella Gaylord."

"—was the night of July twenty-seventh, and I was in New York on business. I was there from the twenty-fifth through the thirtieth, and on the night of the twenty-seventh I was—luckily—with some damned respectable people from dinner time until three in the morning.

"And on the first of August, last week, at the moment this secretary, Dorothy Lee, was killed, I was here in Chicago—but it just happens I was in court testifying on a breach of contract suit against a theater manager. Judge Goerring and the bailiff and the court clerk and three lawyers—one of them mine and two of them the theater's—are all the alibi I've got on that one."

"You've got something there," Sweeney admitted. He took a folded piece of blank copy paper and a pencil from his pockets. "I'll even settle for *one* alibi if it's the real McCoy. Judge Goerring's court, you say? When to when?"

"You're a hard man, Sweeney. Why suspect me, anyway, any more than Joe Blow up there at the bar or the guy next to him."

"Because my room was entered last night. Only a razor and a knife were taken and razor and knives tie up with the Ripper. Up to last night damn few people knew I had any interest in the Ripper. You're one of them."

Greene laughed. "And how did I find out? By reading that eye-witness story you wrote for the *Blade*. What's the circulation of the *Blade*? Half a million?"

Sweeney said, "Excuse me for living. I'll buy you a drink on that, Doc."

"Bourbon straight. Now, have you got a lead to the Ripper yet?"

Sweeney signaled the waiter and ordered, then answered. "Not a lead," he said. "Wish I could snap out of this hangover and think straight. I'm as nervous as a cat."

He unfolded the sheet of copy paper and smoothed it flat. Then he held out his right hand, back up and fingers spread wide, and put the piece of paper on it. The slight trembling, magnified, vibrated the edges of the paper.

"Not as bad as I thought," he said. "Bet you can't do any better." He looked at Greene. "In fact, five bucks you can't."

Greene said, "I should never bet a man at his own game and I've never tried that, but you're on. You're a wreck and I've got nerves like a rock."

Greene picked up the paper and balanced it flat on the back of his hand. The edges vibrated slightly but noticeably less than they had on Sweeney's hand.

Sweeney watched the paper very closely. He asked, "Doc, did you ever hear of the Screaming Mimi?"

THE rate of vibration of the edges of the paper didn't change at all. Watching them, Greene said, "Guess I win, Sweeney. Concede the bet?"

There'd been no reaction, but Sweeney cussed himself silently. The man who'd bought that statuette wouldn't have known the company's nickname for it. Lola Brent, as a new employee, wouldn't have known it to tell him.

Sweeney said, "A small black statuette of a woman screaming."

Doc Greene looked up from the paper, but the vibration of the edges—Sweeney's eyes stayed on the paper—didn't change.

Greene lowered his hand to the table. He said, "What is this? A gag?"

"It was, Doc. But you win the bet." Sweeney handed over the fin. "It's worth

it. You answered my questions so I can believe you—for sure."

"You mean the Screaming Mimi and the black statuette? No, I never heard of either, Sweeney. A statuette of a woman screaming? One and the same thing?"

"Right. And you never heard of either."

"Clever, Sweeney. A homemade lie detec—no, not that; a reaction indicator. I'll keep your five, but I'll buy you a drink out of it. Same?"

Sweeney nodded. Doc signaled.

Doc put his elbows on the table. He said, "Then you were lying. You have got a lead. Tell Papa. Papa might help."

"Baby doesn't want help from Papa. Papa is too anxious to get Baby cut up with a sharp shiv."

"You underrate me, Sweeney. I think I can get it without your help. And I'm curious, now. I will if I have to."

"Prove it."

"All right." Doc Greene's eyes looked enormous, hypnotic, through the lenses of his glasses. "A small black statuette called the Screaming Mimi. Most statuettes are sold in art and gift shops. One of the girls attacked worked, for one day—the day of her murder—in an art and gift shop. I forgot where, but the newspapers would tell me. If I look up the proprietor and ask him if he ever heard of Screaming Mimi, would it get me anywhere?"

Sweeney lifted his glass. "I did underrate you, Doc."

Greene asked, "So do I go to the proprietor of the art store and start from there, or do you break down and tell me?"

"I might as well. Lola Brent sold a small black statuette of a screaming, terrified nude just before she was killed. There's pretty good reason to believe the Ripper was her customer, followed her home and killed her. Likely the figure set him off. It's something that would appeal only to a psycho."

"Do the police know that?"

"No. I'm pretty sure they don't."

"I told you so, Sweeney. The luck of the Irish. By the way, are you crowding your luck too far, or are you going heeled?"

"Heeled?"

"Packing a rod, toting a gun. In a word, armed. If the Ripper—or anyone else—had called on me and removed my small armament of knife and razor, I'd bring up the artillery. If the Ripper knew where *my* room was, I'd sleep with a sawed-off shotgun across my chest. *Or does he know, Sweeney?*"

"You mean?"

"Yes."

Sweeney grinned. "You want my alibis? Well, I don't know anything about two months ago. I doubt if I could check back. As for the next two murders, I was on a two-week drunk. As for night before last, when Yolanda was attacked, I was at the scene of the crime at approximately the time of the crime. How's that for a set of alibis?"

Doc Greene grunted. He said, "I can't remember when I've heard worse. Sweeney, as a practical psychiatrist, I don't think you're the Ripper type, but I've been wrong. Are you?"

Sweeney stood up. He said, "I'm going to let you wonder."

HE WENT outside and it was dusk. His headache was gone and he felt human again.

He walked south on Clark Street without thinking about where he was going, without, in fact, thinking at all. He watched, instead, the movies that were going on inside his head and very nice movies they were. Yolanda sitting across the table from him, even as she had sat only minutes before, Devil, the dog, as well trained as any Seeing-Eye dog, curled up at her feet with a small but incongruous bandage on top of his head.

He sighed, and then grinned. It had never occurred to him that a woman could be that beautiful. He still didn't quite believe it. He'd half expected disillusionment when he'd gone to El Madhouse to meet Doc Greene and Yolanda. He *had*, after all, been pretty drunk when he'd seen—what he'd seen some (How long was it?) forty hours ago.

But, instead, she had been *more* beautiful than he had remembered. Her face had, anyway. And, even more, there had been that intriguing air of mystery about her which, forty hours ago, he had thought was entirely subjective, due to the strange circumstances of the affair in the hallway. It hadn't been; it was really there.

He was crossing Lake Street into the Loop and he kept on going to Randolph and turned west to the tavern, between Clark and LaSalle, where a lot of the

boys from the Blade hung out. None of them seemed to be hanging out there at the moment.

He asked Burt Meaghan, who ran the place and was alone behind the bar at the moment, "Think any of the boys will come around for pinochle after work this evening?"

"Be an unusual evening if they don't. Where you been keeping yourself, Sweeney?"

"Around and about. I've been on a bender if you don't know."

"You were in here a few times the first week of it. Haven't seen you for over a week, though."

"You didn't miss much. Burt, do you know Harry Yahn?"

"Know of him. Not personally I don't know him. I don't move in such high circles. He's got a place a couple blocks west of here that he runs himself. And an interest in a few others."

"I've been out of touch," Sweeney said. "What's the name of the place he runs himself?"

"Name on front of the tavern is the Tit-Tat-Toe. That's just the front, of course. Want an in?"

"Wouldn't need it. I know Harry from way back when. I just lost track of where he was operating."

"He ain't been there long. Month or so. 'Scuse me, Sweeney."

He went down to the other end of the bar to wait on another customer. Sweeney drew wet rings on the bar with the bottom of his glass and wondered if he'd have to see Harry Yahn. He hoped not, because monkeying with Harry Yahn was as healthy as trimming your fingernails on a buzz-saw.

BUT HE was going to need money from somewhere before this thing was over. He still had about a hundred and fifty dollars left out of the three checks Wally had given him, but that wasn't going to go very far.

There was a hand on his shoulder and he turned. It was Wayne Horlick. Sweeney said, "The very guy I wanted to see most. Talk about the luck of the Irish."

Horlick grinned at him. "Costs you ten bucks to be that lucky, Sweeney. I'm glad to see you too. Ten bucks worth."

Sweeney sighed. "From when?"

"Ten days ago. In here. Don't you remember?"

"Sure," Sweeney lied. He paid up. "And a drink for interest?"

"Why not? Rye."

Sweeney downed the last sip of the drink he'd been working on and ordered two. He said, "Why I wanted to see you, if you're curious, is that you've been working on the Ripper case."

"Yeah. The recent parts of it, anyway. I don't know who did the Lola Brent part, couple of months ago. But I got put on the second one, the Stella Gaylord murder, and been at it ever since."

"Any leads?"

"Nary a lead, Sweeney. And if I did get one I'd turn it over to the cops quick-like and cheerful-like. The Ripper's one boy I wouldn't care to meet. Except through bars after Bline gets him. Say, have you talked to this Lang dame?"

"Yes, just an hour or so ago. Why?"

Horlick laughed. "Figured you'd try —after I read that eye-witness account of yours. Nice writing there, pal. Far be it from me to praise anybody else's writing, Sweeney, but that was a minor classic of journalism.

"What's more to the point, it's ten thousand dollars' worth of free publicity for the dame—above and beyond the publicity that getting picked on by the Ripper, and being the first one to survive a Ripper attack, was worth to her. Doc Greene must love you like a brother."

Sweeney laughed. "Sure. Like Cain loved Abel. Say, Horlick, anything come out about any of the cases that didn't get in the papers?"

Horlick thought and then shook his head. "Nothing I can think of, nothing worth mentioning. Why? You really interested? Beyond getting that interview with the strip-teaser? You don't need to explain that."

Sweeney decided to stick to the lie he'd told Joe Carey. "Had in mind to write it up for a fact detective mag."

"Good idea, *if* they ever crack the case. And they will, of course, if the guy keeps on ripping. He can't be lucky forever."

"What do you know about Doc Greene?"

"Why? Going to try to pin it on him?"

"I'd love to. What's your impression of Greene, Horlick?"

"He gives me the creeps. Is that what you mean?"

"That," said Sweeney, "is *exactly* what I mean. For that, I'll buy you another drink. Rye?"

"Rye."

"Hey, Burt, a rye for Horlick. I'll pass this one."

And he really did pass it and wouldn't let Horlick buy back. Half an hour later, he left and went home.

Mrs. Randall heard him come in and opened her door.

"Mr. Sweeney, there's a man to see you. He wanted to wait so I let him wait in my sitting room. Shall I tell him—"

A big man stepped around from behind her. He said, "William Sweeney? My name is Bline, Captain Bline."

CHAPTER IX

SWEENEY stuck out a paw and the detective took it but not enthusiastically. Sweeney pretended not to notice. He said, "I've been wanting to meet you, Cap, since I heard you were on the case. Come up to my room."

Bline followed him up the stairs and into the room. He sat down in the chair Sweeney pointed out to him, the overstuffed one with the creaky springs.

Sweeney sat on the edge of the bed. He glanced at the phonograph and said, "Want some music while we talk, Cap?"

"Hell no. We're gonna talk, not sing duets. And it's me that's going to ask the questions, Sweeney."

"What about?"

"I don't suppose you remember where you were on the afternoon of June eighth, do you?"

"No, I don't. Unless I was working that afternoon. Even then, I wouldn't know offhand if I was in the office doing rewrite, or if I was out on a job."

"You didn't work that day. You were off. I checked at the *Blade*."

"Then all I can tell you is what I probably did, which wouldn't mean much. I probably slept till noon, spent most of the afternoon here reading or listening to music, probably went out in the evening to play some cards and have a few drinks. Or maybe a show or a concert. That part I might possibly be able to check on, but not the afternoon, and I judge that's what you're interested in."

"Right. And how about July twenty-seventh?"

"As hopeless as the next one you're going to ask about, Cap. August first, I mean. God knows where I was either time, except that I'm pretty sure it was in Chicago."

Bline grunted.

Sweeney grinned. He said, "Only I'm not the Ripper. Granted that I don't even know where I was or what I was doing when Stella Gaylord and Dorothy Lee were killed. I know I didn't kill Lola Brent. I wasn't that drunk, I mean drunk enough not to remember something I did, any time in June.

"And I know I didn't make the pass at Yolanda Lang because I do remember Wednesday night. I was beginning to come out of it then. But cheer up, if the Ripper keeps on ripping, maybe I'll have an alibi for the next one."

"That will be a big help."

"Meanwhile, Cap, and seriously, what made you come here to ask me about alibis? Did a little bird tell you? A Greene one?"

"Sweeney, you know damn well why I'm here. Because you were there in front of that door on State Street Wednesday night. The Ripper was probably in front of that door. Way we figure it, he was standing at the back door of that hallway and reached in and slashed as the dame came toward him.

"Only he was a couple of inches short and just nicked her and the dog ran around her and jumped and he had to duck back and slam the door without having a chance for a second try. And then what would he do?"

"You asked it," Sweeney said. "You answer it."

"He might have got the hell out of there, of course. But if he followed the pattern of most psycho killers, he came out of the alley and walked around to the front and was in that knot of people looking through the door when the squad car came."

"Also maybe," Sweeney said, "having put in the call for the police from the tavern on the corner."

BLINE shook his head. He said, "No, we found out who put in that call. Guy that had been standing at the bar there with two other guys, talking, for hours. He left there a little before

two-thirty and he was back in a few minutes.

"Told the guys he'd been talking to and the bartender that there was something going on in a hallway down the street, so maybe he better phone the cops. So he did, and then he and the other two guys—all three of them this time—went together to the place and were there when the squad car came. I've talked to all three of them. They say there were about a dozen people in front of the doorway. Is that what you would say?"

"Pretty close. Not over fifteen at the most."

"And the squad car coppers—even after they saw it was a Ripper job—didn't have sense enough to hold every one of them. We've located five out of the twelve or fifteen. If only we had *all* of 'em—"

"Who is the fifth?" Sweeney asked. "The three who were together and I made four. Who else?"

"Guy who lived in the building. Guess he was the first one to see the woman and the dog. Came home and couldn't get in because the dog started to jump him every time he started to open the door. Other passers-by saw something was happening and stopped to look in too.

"When the guy from the tavern—the one who made the phone call—got there, there were six or eight people. When he got back with his two friends, there were nine or ten besides them."

"I was probably the next arrival," Sweeney said. "I got there just a minute before the squad car came. And to answer your next question, no, I didn't notice anybody else in the crowd. All I noticed was what was going on inside and what the squad car coppers did. And I probably couldn't identify even them."

Bline said dryly, "We don't need them identified. I'd give a lot, though, to have every one of that crowd in front. Instead of five—and four of those five cleared."

"Not counting me?"

"Not counting you."

"What clears the man who lived in the building? The one who, according to his own story, was the first one there?"

"He's reasonably clear. Works a night shift on the *Journal of Commerce* on Grand Avenue. He's a printer. Besides he has solid alibis for all three other rippings. We checked them."

He frowned at Sweeney. "So of the five men we have located who were in that crowd in front of the door, you're the only one without an alibi for anything at all. By the way, here's your cutlery—the lab couldn't get anything on it."

He took an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Sweeney. Sweeney could feel that it contained his penknife and straight razor.

He said, "You might have asked me for them. Did you have a search warrant?"

Bline chucked.

"We didn't want you in our hair while we were casing the joint. As for a warrant, does it matter now?"

Sweeney opened his mouth and then closed it again. It was going to be helpful if not necessary to have Bline friendly to him; there were things the police could do that he couldn't.

So he said, mildly, "You might have left a note. When I missed those, I thought maybe the Ripper thought I was the Ripper. Say, Cap, what do you know about this guy Greene, Doc Greene?"

"Why?"

"I kind of like to think of him as the Ripper, that's all. He tells me he's got alibis and that you've checked them. That right?"

"More or less. No alibi for Lola Brent and the one for Dorothy Lee isn't perfect."

"Not perfect? I thought that was the one where he was testifying in court under Judge Goerring."

"The times don't fit perfectly. His alibi takes him up to about ten minutes after four. Dorothy Lee wasn't found dead until about five o'clock—maybe a few minutes after. The coroner said she'd been dead at least an hour when he saw her at five-thirty but that means she could have been killed at four-thirty, twenty minutes after Greene's alibi ends."

SAID Sweeney, "Then it's no alibi at all."

Bline said, "Not an iron-clad one, no. But there are angles. She left work at two forty-five to go home because she was sick. Ordinarily she worked till five. Even if Greene knew her—and there's no proof he did—he wouldn't have known

he'd find her home if he rushed there right from court."

"Suppose Greene knew her—well. He could have had a date to pick her up at her apartment after five. But he gets through in court a little after four and goes there to wait for her. Maybe he even has a key and lets himself in to wait, not knowing she came home sick and is already there."

"Oh, it's *possible*, Sweeney. I told you it wasn't a perfect alibi. But you've got to admit it isn't likely. The Ripper probably followed her home, seeing her on the street for the first time after she left work. Like he probably followed Lola Brent home from the gift shop.

"He couldn't have been waiting for Lola Brent at her place for two reasons—first, he couldn't have known she was going to be fired and come home early. Second, she was living with a man, Sammy Cole. He couldn't have known Sammy wouldn't walk in on him."

"And anyway," Sweeney said, "Lola wasn't killed in her apartment but in the areaway outside the buildings. Sure, she was probably followed. And so was Stella Gaylord—followed as far as the mouth of the alley. But the Ripper doesn't always use the following technique. He didn't follow Yolanda Lang home. He was waiting for her outside that door at the back of the hallway in her building."

"You've really studied this case, haven't you, Sweeney?"

"Why not?" Sweeney asked. "It's my job."

"As I get it, you haven't been assigned to it yet."

"Not exactly, Cap. But I was assigned on at least one angle of it when Wally Krieg told me to write that eye-witness account. And I figured because of that *in* I had on the case, he'd probably ask me to do more when I go back to work Monday, so I read up on the case, what's already been in the papers, and asked a few questions."

"On your own time?"

"Why not? I got interested in it. You'd still follow the case if you got taken off it, wouldn't you?"

"Guess I would," Bline admitted with a nod.

"How about Greene's other alibi, the New York one? How well did you check on that one?"

Bline grinned.

"You're hell-bent to fit Greene into this, huh, Sweeney?"

"Have you met him, Cap?"

"Sure."

"That's why. I've known him a day and a half now and I think the fact that he's still alive is pretty good proof I'm not the Ripper."

Bline laughed. "That ought to work both ways, Sweeney. He seems to like you almost as much as you like him. And you're still alive. About the New York alibi—we gave it to the New York police and they checked the hotel he was staying at. But aside from that, he knows *one* of the four dames who were attacked. To my mind, that's damn near an alibi in itself."

"How do you figure that?"

Bline said, "When we get the Ripper, I'll bet you we find he knew *all* of the four women or none of them. Murderers—even psychopathic ones—follow that pattern, Sweeney. He wouldn't have picked three strangers and one friend."

"And you've checked—?"

"We've checked. We've made up lists as complete as we could of everybody who knew each of the four women, and then we've compared the lists. There's been only one name that appeared on even two of the four lists and that much is allowable to coincidence."

"Who is it?"

"Raoul Reynarde, the guy who runs the gift shop that Lola Brent got fired from the day she was killed. Turns out he also had a slight acquaintance with Stella Gaylord, the B-girl."

"Good God, what for?"

BLINE grinned. "I see you've met him. But why not? Lots of faggots have friends who are women. You have male friends, don't you?"

"You checked him for alibis?"

"Fairly good ones on two of the cases. Especially on the Lola Brent one. He couldn't have followed her home after he fired her without closing the store and there's fairly good evidence—negative evidence, anyway—that he didn't close it."

Sweeney sighed. "Wash him out, then. I still like Doc Greene."

"Sweeney, you're nuts. All you mean is that you *don't* like him. Not a thing to point to him otherwise. We've got a hell of a lot better suspect than Greene."

"You mean me?"

"I mean you. Look, not even a shadow of an alibi for *any* murder. Your extreme interest in the case. The fact that you are psychically unbalanced—or you wouldn't be an alcoholic. And the fact that, in one case out of the four, we can put you right there at the scene of the crime at the very time of the crime. If you weren't—"

"If I weren't what?"

"Skip it."

Sweeney said, "Wait, I get it. You mean if I wasn't a reporter, you'd probably drag me in and sweat me down a bit on the off chance. But you figure I'll be writing on the case and that you couldn't hold me long and once I got out the *Blade's* stories would play merry hell with the captain in charge of the Ripper detail."

BLINE'S laugh was a little embarrassed. He said, "I guess that isn't too far off, Sweeney. But damn it, man, can't you give me something that'll let me write you off, so I won't have to waste so much time on you?"

Sweeney shook his head. "I wish I could, Cap." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Tell you what, though. I'll do the next best thing. I'll buy you a drink—at El Madhouse. First show goes on in a few minutes. You know she's dancing again tonight already."

"I know everything. Except who the Ripper is. Sure, Sweeney, I was thinking of dropping in there tonight anyway. Let's go."

At the door, before he reached back to turn out the light, Sweeney looked at the black statuette on the radio, the slim, naked girl, arms outraised to ward off ineffable evil, a silent scream eternally frozen on her lips. He grinned at her and tossed her a kiss before he flicked off the light and followed Bline down the stairs.

They hailed a cab at Rush Street. Sweeney said "El Madhouse" to the driver and then leaned back and lighted a cigarette. He looked at Bline, sitting back, relaxed, his eyes closed. He said, "You don't really think I might be the Ripper, Cap. Or you wouldn't relax like that."

"Like what?" Bline's voice was soft. "I was watching your hands and letting you think my eyes were all the way closed. And there's a gun in my right coat pocket."

CHAPTER X

EL MADHOUSE was crowded. Over the waiter's shoulder Sweeney could see that more tables than usual had been crowded into the big back room, and that every table was crowded.

A three-piece orchestra—not good but not bad—was playing back there now, and a woman with gravel in her throat was singing a torch song, probably the first number of the floor show.

He grunted disgustedly, but Bline took him by the arm and started with him toward a table from which a couple was just rising. They got the seats and Bline said, "We don't want to go back there yet. Show's just starting and Yolanda won't come on for forty minutes or so."

He caught a rushing waiter by the arm and said, "Send Nick over right away, will you?"

The waiter tried to pull loose. "Nick's busy."

Bline's free hand pulled back his lapel for a brief flash of silver plate. He said, "Send Nick over."

"Who's Nick?" Sweeney asked, when the waiter had vanished into the crowd.

"Nick runs the place nights for Harry Yahn." He grinned. "I don't really want to see him but it's the only way we'll get drinks right away. What you having?"

"Whiskey highball. Maybe I'll have to buy one of those badges. It's a system, if it works."

"It works," Bline said. He looked up as a dapper, stocky man came up to the table. "Hi, Nick. Everything under control?"

The stocky man grunted. "If there weren't so many deadheads in the house, we'd be doing better. Four coppers back there already taking up room and now you come."

"And Sweeney, Nick. This is Sweeney, of the *Blade*. He comes too. You can crowd in an extra chair for him, can't you?"

"Cash customer?"

"Cash customer," Sweeney said.

Nick smiled and from the smile Sweeney expected him to rub his hands to-

gether, too. But instead he stuck one out to Sweeney. "I was kidding, Mr. Sweeney. It's on the house for you. I read that story you wrote. But it cost us money, too."

Sweeney said, "How?"

"Greene. He's holding us up, and we got to pay it to cash in." He turned around and grabbed a flying waiter, the same one Bline had grabbed. "What you gentlemen having?"

"Whiskey and soda for both of us," Bline told him.

"Make it three, Charlie, and make it next," Nick told the waiter. He brought a chair from somewhere and sat down at the table with them just as the drinks came.

"Bumps," Sweeney said. "And how come Greene could hold you up? Isn't Yolanda under contract?"

"Sure she is. For four more weeks. But—"

Sweeney cut in: "Doc Greene told me for three."

"Greene wouldn't tell the truth on a bet, even where it don't matter, Mr. Sweeney. Sure, she's under contract through September fifth, but the contract's got a clause."

"Most contracts have," Sweeney said.

"Yeah. Well, this clause says she don't have to work if she's sick or hurt. Lookit the crowd tonight, and they're spending money, too. But we had to offer a one-grand bonus if she'd forget she was shocked. A bonus—that's what Doc calls a bribe."

SWEENEY asked: "But is she okay to dance this soon? She really was suffering from shock. I saw her face when she stood up in that hallway."

"You didn't mention her face."

"Sure, I did. Before the dog pulled the zipper. But we got off the track. Isn't it a bit soon for her to start dancing again?"

"Naw. If she got shocked, she was over it by the time she had a night's sleep. And the scratch was just a scratch. She'll be wearing a strip of adhensive tape eight inches long. That's what the customers are paying to see. Well, not all they're paying to see." He pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Well, I got to do things. Want to go back now? Yo won't be on for half an hour yet, but the rest of the show don't stink too much."

The voice of an emcee telling jokes came from the back room and both Sweeney and Bline shook their heads. Bline said, "We'll look you up when we want to move back."

"Sure. I'll send you two more drinks here then."

He went away, taking his chair back to wherever it had come from.

Sweeney asked Bline, "Yolanda just do one number?"

"Right now, yes. Before the excitement, she was on twice. A straight strip-tease for the third number on the show and then the specialty with the dog for the last number. But Nick told me this afternoon that to get her to go back right away, they agreed to let her do just the one number, the specialty, on each show."

Their drinks came. Bline looked down into his for a moment and then squarely at Sweeney. He said, "Maybe I was a little rough on you tonight, Sweeney. In the cab, I mean."

Sweeney said, "I'm glad you were."

"Why? So you can pan me in the *Blade* with a clear conscience?"

"Not that. As far as I know to date you don't deserve any panning. Not for the way you've handled the case. But now I can hold out on you with a clear conscience."

Bline frowned. "You can't hold back any evidence, Sweeney. Not and get away with it. What is it you're holding back?" He leaned forward, suddenly intent. "Did you notice anything there on State Street Wednesday night that you didn't tell about in the write-up?"

"I didn't. You've got the whole truth and nothing but the truth on that. I mean, if in playing around with the case and doing my own investigating and question-asking, I come on anything that you missed, it's my own business. I mea , until I get enough of it to beat you out on cracking the case."

Bline said, "Let's take it as of now. Right here and now. Will you give me your word of honor on the answer to one question?"

"If I answer it at all, I'll answer it straight. It isn't by any chance, whether I'm the Ripper, is it?"

"No. If you are, I wouldn't expect a straight answer. So I'm asking this on the assumption that you're not. Do you know, or even think you might know, who the Ripper is? Either by sight or

by name, do you even suspect anybody?"

"No, definitely not. Unless it's Doc Greene and I haven't a damn bit of reason for that except *I'd like* him to be."

BLINE sat back. He said, "Okay, then. I've got a lot of men under me on this, and besides that we've got the whole police force keeping an eye out. If you, all by yourself, get anything we miss, it's your baby. It'd probably get you a knife in the belly, but that's your business."

Sweeney said, "Fair enough, Cap. And for those kind words—especially about the knife, I'll even forgive you for taking my razor and penknife without telling me and scaring the pants off me when I found them gone. Why didn't you leave a note?"

"Wanted to see how you'd react. If you'd been the Ripper, and found them gone, you'd have probably been even worse scared. You know, Sweeney, I've just about decided you're not the Ripper."

"Awfully sweet of you, Cap. But I'll bet you tell that to all the boys. By the way, have I been t a i l e d while you thought I was it?"

"Today, yes. Hadn't got around to you yet yesterday. But I'll pull the guy off of you now, I guess. Especially now that you know about it. Well, what do you say we go in out of the rain? She'll be on in ten minutes."

They found Nick and he took them past the big waiter who guarded the portal. The gravel-voiced torch singer was at it again as they threaded their way through barely navigable aisles among the close-packed, crowded tables.

They had barely started across the room when Sweeney felt his arm gripped from behind and turned. Bline was leaning his head close. He had to yell to make himself heard above the music and the noise, but pitched his voice so it wouldn't carry past Sweeney.

"Forgot to tell you, Sweeney. Keep your eyes open in here. Watch the faces and see if you see anybody you remember being by that door on State Street. Get me?"

Sweeney nodded. Nick led them to a table where three men sat.

Bline said, "Sit down, Sweeney. Want to talk to an outpost or two before I squat."

Sweeney took the chair and glanced at his three companions, all of whom were watching the singer and paying no attention to him. She wasn't bad to watch but he wished he didn't have to listen to her, too.

Bline came back. Sweeney moved over to make more room, and Bline said, "Sweeney—Ross, Guerney, Swann. Anything doing, boys?"

The one called Swann said, "Guy over at the corner table acts a little screwy. I been keeping an eye on him. The one with the carnation in his buttonhole. Maybe he's just a little drunk."

Bline watched that way a while. He said, "Don't think so. The Ripper wouldn't call attention to himself dressing up like that and wearing a flower, would he? And I don't think the Ripper'd get drunk."

"Thanks for that last thought," Sweeney said.

Bline turned to him. "See anybody might have been there that night?"

"Only the guy across from me there, the one you introduced as Guerney. Isn't he one of the boys from the squad car?"

Guerney had turned back at the sound of his name. He said, "Yeah. It was me that creased the dog."

"Nice shooting."

Bline said, "Guerney's one of the best shots in the department. His partner's here, too. Kravich. He's at the bar out there, watching 'em as they come and go."

"Didn't notice him."

"He noticed you. Sure you haven't seen anybody else that—"

"No," said Sweeney. "Shhhh."

THE emcee was on stage — it had turned out to be actually a stage although a small one, about eight feet deep and twelve feet wide—and was building up an introduction to Yolanda Lang and her world-famous Beauty and the Beast dance. Sweeney wanted to hear.

Not that it was worth hearing. The emcee had dropped his corny humor and was being cornier by far. It was pathetically bathetic, Sweeney thought. He tried now *not* to listen.

The lights dimmed, and the room was quiet. As miraculously quiet as though two hundred people were holding their breath. You could hear the click of the switch as a spotlight went on, from somewhere in the back room, throwing

a bright circle of yellow low light on the left side of the stage.

A drum began to throb and the tone and pitch of it pulled Sweeney's eyes away from the stage. The pianist and the sax-player had left the platform. The trap-drummer had left his traps and sat before a single kettledrum, a big one, tuned low. His only weapons were two drumsticks with big well-padded heads.

The drum throbbed a slow crescendo and the spotlight dimmed. You caught a flash of movement in the dimness. Then, as the yellow circle blazed bright again, she stood there full in its center, stood poised unmoving.

And she *was* beautiful—there was no doubt of that. The picture Sweeney had been carrying in his mind had not been exaggeration, not in the slightest. He thought, now, that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. And by the collective catch of breath of the audience, he knew that he was not alone in thinking so. What, he wondered, was she doing in a dive like this, on Clark Street in Chicago?

She wore a gown exactly like the one she had worn for the scene in the hallway, except this one was black and that had been white. This one was better, Sweeney thought. It was strapless, molded to every curve of her body.

She was barefoot, the black gown her only visible garment. This wasn't to be a gradual strip-tease like other strip-teases. It would be one blinding flash from black to white, from cloth to flesh.

The drum throbbed.

You thought she was a statue there and then—so gradually that you weren't sure at first—she moved. Merely to turn her head.

And when it was turned your eyes followed hers. You saw, as she saw, what crouched in semi-darkness on the other side of the stage. It was Devil, the dog—only he wasn't a dog at all now. He crouched there, his jaws slightly parted in a silent snarl of bared white teeth. His yellow eyes seemed luminous in the dimness.

The drumbeat died down to almost-inaudibility. And in the almost-silence, the dog snarled loudly. It was the same sound, exactly the same sound, that Sweeney had heard before, two nights ago.

Still half-crouched, the dog took a stiff-legged step toward the woman. He snarled again and crouched to spring.

There was a sudden quick movement across the table from him that pulled Sweeney's eyes from the tense drama on the stage. There was a gun in Guerney's hand.

Bline whispered hoarsely, "You goddam fool, it's part of the act."

GUERNEY whispered back, "Just in case. In case he *does* jump her. I could get him before he got her throat."

"Put back that gun, you goddam sap, or I'll break you."

The gun went slowly back into the shoulder holster. Guerney's hand came out from under his coat but stayed near his lapel. Sweeney's eyes jerked back to the stage as a sudden intake of breath from the audience backgrounded a yip from a woman at a table near the stage.

The dog was leaping.

But the woman moved, too, one step aside and the dog flashed past her and down, alighted and turned in a flash of brownness, crouched again, and now she was in the middle of the stage as he leaped. Again she was not there when he landed.

The dog—as though convinced that leaping was futile—crouched now in the center of the stage, turning as she danced around him.

And she *could* dance—well if not superlatively—gracefully if not significantly. The dog, now no longer snarling, pivoted, his yellow eyes following every move she made.

Then, alongside the now-tamed Beast, Beauty sank to her knees and put her hand upon the dog's head. He snarled but tolerated the caress.

The drum throbbed, the beat accelerated.

And then, as Yolanda gracefully rose to her feet, facing the audience from the center of the yellow circle of light that already, but very gradually, was starting to fade, the dog padded behind her. It reared up, as tall as she, and then as it started downward its teeth caught the tab sewed to the tag of the zipper and pulled.

And the black dress, as had the white one, fell suddenly in a circle about her feet.

She was incredibly beautiful despite—Sweeney thought—the fact that she was overdressed. Overdressed in a nar-

row, transparent bra of wide-meshed net diaphanous as dew and confining as air, that seemed to accentuate rather than conceal the beauty of her voluptuous breasts—and in a G-string which, in the slowly fading light, might not have been there at all—and one more garment, an eight-inch strip of black adhesive tape, slightly slanting, across her white belly just below the navel.

The drumbeat faded and the light faded and then went out and the stage was dark. When the lights went on the stage was empty.

And the lights went on brightly all over the room, and the floor show was over. People applauded madly but Yolanda Lang did not return.

Over the noise, Bline asked Sweeney, "How'd you like it?"

"It or her?"

"It. The dance."

"Probably symbolic as hell, but symbolic of what, I don't know. I don't think the choreographer did, either. If there *was* a choreographer. My idea is that Doc Greene figured it out. It's just crazy enough—and just smart enough—for his fine Italian hand."

Bline said, "Greene's not Italian. I think he's mostly German."

SWEENEY was spared answering because Guerney had turned around and Bline was looking at him balefully. He said, "For a plugged nickel I'd make you turn in your gun."

Guerney flushed and looked foolish. "I wasn't gonna shoot, unless—"

Nick saved Guerney further embarrassment by appearing at their table. He said, "Another round of drinks is coming, gentlemen. How'd you like the show? Sure is a well-trained pooch?"

Sweeney said, "He showed more self-control, under the circumstances, than I would have."

"Me either," Guerney said. He started to grin but caught Bline's eye and found he was still in disgrace. He said, "Gotta see a man about a—I mean, excuse me."

He threaded his way off between the tables. Nick slid into the vacated chair and said, "I'll stay a minute till he gets back. Did you notice anything during the show, Captain?"

Sweeney said, "Everything the G-string didn't cover. You know, some time I'd like to see her without *anything* on."

Nick stared at him. "Huh? I thought, according to your story in the paper—"

Sweeney shook his head gloomily. "Shoes," he said. "She wore black, high-heeled shoes."

Bline snorted. He said, "This guy has a one-track mind, Nick. What did you mean, did I notice anything during the show?"

Nick leaned forward. "Only this—that part where she's poised there, still, facing the audience and front-stage-center, with the light fading out. I been worried about that. I don't want her killed either, and if the Ripper should show here, that'd be his chance."

"Maybe, but how?"

"The audience is in the dark, almost dark anyway. And if he decided to throw that shiv of his it'd be hard to tell just where it come from."

Bline looked thoughtful and then shook his head. "Sounds pretty remote, Nick. Unless he's already a knife-thrower, and it's a million to one against, it'd take him months of practice to learn. I'm not telling anybody *exactly* what precautions we're taking or not taking. Especially with a reporter sitting here who'd put it in the paper so the Ripper would be sure to know."

"Thanks," said Sweeney, "for demoting me from suspect to reporter. If I were the Ripper and wanted to get her, I wouldn't try it on the street again; I'd be under her bed waiting for her. Say, does Devil sleep in the same room with her?"

Bline looked at him sharply. "That's not for publication. But yes."

"About that knife-throwing," Nick said. "What about if he can throw them?"

Sweeney said, "Here he comes. Ask him if he can."

CHAPTER XI

DOC GREENE was coming toward them, worming his way through the people who were leaving after the first floor show.

Bline looked to see who was coming and then looked at Sweeney disgustedly. He said, "You and that damn hunch."

Doc Greene was carrying a foul, fat

cigar, but no knife. Nick stood up and said, "Hi, Doc. Well, I got to go. So long."

Doc nodded to him and asked Bline how he liked the show.

Bline said, "Great. Sit down, Greene."

Doc Greene grinned at Sweeney. Not a nice grin. He said, "Do I have to ask how you liked it?"

"No," Sweeney told him. "I hear you held Nick—or rather Harry Yahn—up for thousand bucks."

"I wouldn't call it a hold-up. Yolanda shouldn't be dancing so soon after what happened. It's taking a chance with her health. Naturally, she deserves something extra for that, if she does."

"Does she get it?"

"Naturally. Of course, as her manager, I get my cut."

"What percent is that?"

"That's my business."

"And business is good," Sweeney said. "You know, Doc, there's something I'd like to ask you."

"I might even answer it."

"How come Yolanda is playing a place like this? It's peanuts to the bookings you could get her."

"You're telling me. But we're under contract here; I told you that. Yahn won't let us break the contract. Know what we're getting here? A lousy two hundred a week."

"You don't get me," Sweeney said. "What I mean is why *was* she working for a lousy two hundred a week? Even without the publicity she ought to have been nearer the big time than Clark Street."

Greene spread his hands. "Maybe you could do for her. It's easy to say, Sweeney. Only you won't get a chance to try. I got her signed up under contract."

"For how long?"

"Again, my business."

Sweeney said, "I suggest you haven't wanted to get her better bookings, for reasons of your own."

"You're very suggestive. Would you like me to make a suggestion?"

"I could guess it in advance. But I can make another one." Sweeney glanced quickly to see that Bline was listening. He said, "How's this for a suggestion? Maybe the Ripper never attacked Yolanda at all. Maybe it was a publicity stunt. Maybe you cooked it up. She could have given herself that little cut with, say, a safety razor blade, and then she could have lain down on the floor till someone saw her through the glass."

"Having swallowed the razor blade?"

"Having, possibly, dropped it in her mailbox slot. She was standing right by the mailboxes."

Bline said, "No, Sweeney. The hallway was searched, including the mailboxes. No weapon. And it wasn't in a shoe or in her dress either."

Greene bowed ironically. "Thank you, Sweeney. For implying for the first time that I'm not the Ripper."

"Don't mention it. And then, Cap, there's still another possibility. Maybe you've already thought of it. But that wound was pretty slight. Not enough to incapacitate her at all. She could have come home, gone up to her apartment, made that slit with a razor and washed the razor or whatever and put it away, then she could go back downstairs and lie in the hallway till somebody saw her."

Bline said, "We thought of that. Several little things against it, and one big one. Little things like the scratch marks on the back door. Another little thing. It couldn't have been sure—unless you were in on it, Sweeney—that you'd be there to give it that write-up. Were you in on it?"

SWEENEY grinned. "Sure. That's why I'm suggesting it now. But what's the one big thing that proves it wasn't a put-up job?"

"The shock, Sweeney. She got over it within twelve hours, yes, but she was really suffering from shock when she got to the hospital."

Sweeney said, "Okay. It was an idea while it lasted. I'm glad it was wrong. It would have made a prize sucker out of me for the story I wrote."

Greene said blandly, "I'll tell Yo what you thought and that you suggested it to the police. She'll like you better for it, no doubt."

Sweeney glared at him.

Greene smiled and leaned across the table. He said, "The thing I like about you, Sweeney, is that your reactions are so completely predictable, so primitive, so utterly lacking in subtlety. You should know that I would do no such foolish thing."

"And why not?"

"Because I *am* subtle, and civilized.

The last thing I would do is to make Yolanda angry at you, lest anger react. Women are subtle, too, whether civilized or not. But you wouldn't understand that."

Bline was grinning at Sweeney. He said, "I'm liking this. It's your turn."

Sweeney said, "I'd rather discuss this outside."

"The animal plane," Greene said "The three things for which the Irish are famous: drinking, fighting, and—well, the third, in Sweeney's case, is reduced to *voyeurism.*"

"The mask slipped, Doc," Sweeney said. "You really are a psychiatrist, Doc?"

"I really am."

"And you honestly do not recogize that you yourself are not sane? Look, I don't know your relations with Yolanda—and don't bother trying to tell me, because I wouldn't be able to believe you, either way. But, whichever, your attitude toward her is not sane and normal.

"As her manager, you let her get up in front of a crowd of creeps in a honkey-tonk. strip for them and get their tongues hanging out, and you tolerate it. Maybe you even like it—maybe you've got a case of inverted voyeurism.

"Thousands of men must have wanted her and tried to get her. You couldn't have reacted to all of them as you've reacted to me. Your adrenals wouldn't have stood the strain. So there's something different in my case. Know what it is, Doc?"

Greene was wary, his eyes hooded. "No, I don't." He sounded honestly puzzled.

"Then I'll tell you. It's because these other guys have only wanted and tried. You know I'm going to succeed."

Bline must have been watching Greene's face, because he was on his feet and leaning over the table even as Greene started across it. Greene's chair went over backward but he stopped as Bline caught his arms, although he paid no attention to Bline. He said softly, "I'm going to kill you, Sweeney."

Then he jerked loose from Bline's grip, turned and walked away.

Nick was suddenly there. "Anything wrong, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Everything is lovely," Sweeney said.

"There's not going to be any trouble?" Nick asked.

"No, Nick," Bline said.

NICK nodded and left them. Bline relaxed in the chair and turned to Sweeney. "Sweeney, you'd better be careful. Of course he didn't mean what he said about killing you; he wouldn't have said that in front of me if he really meant it."

Sweeney said, "I wish I was sure of that. If he's sane, yes. But—Ripper or no Ripper—I wouldn't bet on his being sane."

"How about yourself?"

Sweeney grinned. "I may be crazy, but I'm not insane." He stood up. "Maybe that's enough excitement for one evening. Guess I'll hit for home."

"Your door got a good lock?"

Sweeney frowned at him. "You should know," he said. "Unless I left it unlocked the other night when you borrowed my razor."

Bline stood up too. He said, "I'll walk with you a block or two. I can use some fresh air."

When they were outside, walking north on Clark, he said, "If your razor being missing really scared you, Sweeney, I'm sorry about it. Happened this way—I sent two of the boys around to bring you in for questioning Thursday night and told 'em to bring your arsenal too.

"I didn't tell them to bring the arsenal if you *weren't* there, and they overstepped a little. One of them—I won't say who—is pretty good on locks and loves a chance to show off how he can open them."

"I know who that would be. You needn't tell me."

"Don't be foolish, Sweeney. Lots of guys on the force are good at locks."

"But only one of them has been to my room before, and anybody else would have had to ask Mrs. Randall instead of going straight up. And with her there they couldn't have gone on in. So that makes it the guy I'm thinking about. And I thought he was a friend of mine."

"Forget it, Sweeney. Damn it, man, friendship doesn't count when you're looking for a killer. You saw a job of his work—a botched one. It wouldn't be so funny to you if you'd seen the real McCoy."

"I don't think it's funny."

"Then I wish you and Doc Greene would lay off that Punch-and-Judy show of yours and quit messing things up trying to make each other out to be the

Ripper. Yeah, he fooled me, Sweeney. It was after a talk with him Thursday evening that I sent the boys around for you and your cutlery. I didn't know then that he was using me as a cat's-paw because he hated you for personal reasons."

"And if I try to get you to suspect him I guess you think it's for personal reasons too."

"Isn't it? Mostly?"

Sweeney sighed. "That and a hunch."

"Well, play your hunch if you want to. But don't expect me to." They were nearing the corner of Erie and Bline slowed down. He said, "You turn east here. Guess I'll go back to the madhouse. And stay away from Greene. I don't want to have to jug you both for mayhem, and it's going to be that or worse if you keep tangling."

He stuck out a hand. "Friends, Sweeney?"

"I'm not the Ripper? You're sure?"

"Reasonably sure."

Sweeney took his hand, and grinned. "And I'm getting to be reasonably sure you're not a so-and-so, Cap, I sure had you pegged as one for a while."

"Can't say I blame you. Well, so long."

Sweeney stood for a moment on the corner. He saw Bline look around and then cut diagonally across the street, which took him out of his way if he was returning to El Madhouse. To make sure that Bline had pulled Sweeney's tail off the job he pretended to turn south at Erie and State and then waited in the doorway of a store next to the corner one to see if anyone would turn into State Street after him. No one did.

HE whistled a little as he went back to Erie and on east to his room. There was no Ripper waiting for him. But there was Mimi.

He picked her up and held her gently, and she screamed at him, pushing toward him with tiny, fending hands. Again a little chill went down his spine. Somewhere in Chicago there was another Mimi just like this one, and *she* had something to scream about. The Ripper had her.

Call her Mimi number one. What if the Ripper knew that he, Sweeney, had Mimi number two?

He put Mimi down, very gently. He wished she'd stop screaming, but she never would. A silent scream can never be silenced.

No, definitely the police didn't know about Mimi. Otherwise Bline would never have sat here in the same room with her without noticing or mentioning her. He'd looked right at her at least once.

And, of course, he'd mentioned Mimi to Doc Greene and Doc hadn't reacted. No, if Greene really was—despite alibis, despite everything—the Ripper, then maybe the whole Mimi lead was a blind alley. Maybe the Ripper hadn't made that purchase from Lola Brent at the gift shop.

Sweeney, he told himself, you can't have your cake and eat it too. If Mimi is a legitimate lead to the Ripper, then Greene can't be the Ripper—as you damn well would like to have him be.

He sighed.

Then he sat down on the bed and started the job he'd come home to do—reading up on the third murder, the Dorothy Lee one. He felt that he knew Stella Gaylord and Lola Brent pretty well by now.

He picked up the *Blade* of August 1st.

That story, of course, he didn't have to look for. It was the third Ripper job and it splashed page one banners the day it broke.

There was a three-column picture of Dorothy Lee and Sweeney studied it. She was blond—like Lola, like Stella, like Yolanda—and definitely pretty, if not beautiful. It was a good portrait photograph and—if it was taken recently—she was probably in her early twenties.

The story said she was beautiful, but the story would have said that in any case, provided only that she was under forty and didn't have buck teeth or crossed eyes.

The story said that she was Dorothy Lee, 25, beautiful blond, private secretary of J. P. Andrews, sales manager of the Reiss Corporation at an address on Division Street that Sweeney recognized as being near Dearborn.

Her home address, he noticed with surprise, was on East Erie Street, only a block from his own. Only a block from where he sat right now reading about it. Good Lord, he thought, why hadn't Bline mentioned that? Of course—Bline thought he already knew it, since he was working on the case.

Maybe that was another reason why Bline had suspected him.

BEFORE reading on he pictured mentally a map of Chicago and mentally marked the scenes of the four forays of the Ripper. Three had been quite near.

True, the very first murder, that of Lola Brent, had been on the South Side, miles away, but it had probably started on the Near North Side—when the killer had trailed her home from the gift shop on Division Street, only a dozen blocks north. As he might possibly have trailed Dorothy Lee home from the Reiss Corporation on that same street.

He fixed imaginary x's on the imaginary map in his mind and then went back to the newspaper.

The body had been found a few minutes after five o'clock by Mrs. Roe Haley, divorcée, who lived in the apartment next to Miss Lee's. Returning home after an afternoon at the movies, Mrs. Haley noticed what seemed to be a stream of blood—and which, it later turned out, really was blood—coming from under the doorway of Dorothy Lee's apartment.

Of course it might have been that Dorothy—with whom Mrs. Haley was acquainted—had dropped and broken a jar of tomato juice or a bottle of ketchup Nevertheless, this was the third Ripper case, and Mrs. Haley, along with most of the rest of Chicago, was Ripper-conscious. She had dashed into her own apartment and locked and chained the door. Then she had phoned down to the janitor, telling him what she had seen.

David Wheeler, the janitor, had put an old service revolver in his pocket and climbed from the basement to the third floor—which contained five small apartments, including those of Miss Lee and Mrs. Haley. With the gun ready in his hand, he had tried the doorbell first and then the door, which was locked. He then bent down to examine the little red rivulet and decided that it was quite probably blood.

He had rung the bell of Mrs. Haley's apartment and, when she opened it on the chain, told her that the police had better be sent for. Mrs. Haley had phoned them herself, being too frightened by that time to open her door wider than the length of the chain. Wheeler had stood guard in the hallway.

They had broken down the door of the apartment and had found Dorothy Lee lying on the floor about three feet back from the locked door.

They had found that the chain of the door had not been fastened and that the lock was a snap type which would have locked automatically after the killer when he had closed the door after him.

The police believed, from the position of the body, that the killer had barely entered the apartment. Miss Lee still wore her hat and had obviously just returned to her room. Police believed the killer had followed her home and had rung the doorbell almost as soon as Miss Lee had closed the door.

When she had opened the door, he had stepped through and used his knife. Perhaps she had not had time to scream; if she had, no one had heard her.

Having made the fatal cut, police reasoned, the Ripper had immediately backed out of the door, closing it and letting it lock after him. Aside from the body, there was no sign of his presence in the apartment, which was neat and in perfect order. Miss Lee's purse was on a small table near the door; it contained about fourteen dollars in bills and change. Neither her wrist watch nor an opal ring had been taken from the body.

She had left work at two forty-five o'clock, complaining of a toothache; the office manager had suggested that she visit a dentist and take the rest of the afternoon off. The coroner's physician who examined the body found evidence that she had really visited a dentist. There was a temporary packing in a tooth that appeared to be abscessed.

IF THE temporary packing hadn't stopped her toothache the Ripper had. According to the physician who had examined the body at five-thirty she had at that time been dead between one and two hours—between half past three and half past four.

Sweeney took up the next paper and looked for further details.

The dentist had been found, a Dr. Krimmer, who had his office on Dearborn Street, a little over three blocks south of Division Street. Dorothy Lee had come to him at about three o'clock suffering from a toothache. She had no appointment and was a new patient, but because she was obviously in distress he had taken her out of turn. That would have been, he estimated, about ten minutes after three.

She had been in his chair only ten or

fifteen minutes. He had been able to give her only a temporary treatment to relieve the pain. He had suggested an appointment for further work the next morning.

He had no record of the exact time she had left his office but he thought it would hardly have been earlier than twenty minutes after three nor later than half past.

Sweeney skimmed through the few succeeding issues of the paper and found no new developments of importance.

He went back to the first one and studied the picture of Dorothy Lee again. It looked vaguely familiar—which wasn't strange if she lived only a block away. Damn it, he'd probably passed her on the street half a dozen times. He looked at the picture again and wished that he had known her.

He jerked his mind back from the edge of maudlinness to the problem at hand—the Ripper.

Bline had been right, then, about Doc Greene's alibi; it wasn't perfect, but it was good. To rush from court—

Damn Greene, he thought. If only he could positively eliminate Greene, maybe he could get some constructive thoughts in other directions.

He got up and began to pace back and forth, trying to think.

He glanced at his watch and saw that it wasn't yet quite midnight. Maybe he could eliminate Greene, tonight. Maybe —better if possible—he could implicate him, tonight. A spot of burglary, suitably chaperoned, might accomplish either.

CHAPTER XII

HE locked the door on Mimi, leaving her alone and screaming in the dark. He stopped at the phone in the hallway and dialed the number of an inexpensive hotel on downtown Clark Street. He gave a room number. It was rung, and an annoyed voice answered.

Sweeney said, "Ehlers? This is Sweeney."

"The hell, Bill; I was just going to turn in. Tired. But since when you call me Ehlers instead of Jay?"

Sweeney said, very distinctly, "Since yesterday evening when you entered my room without a warrant."

"Huh? Listen, Sweeney, it was orders. And what was Bline's idea in telling you it was me?"

"Bline didn't tell me. And it wasn't orders."

Ehlers said, "Oh—hell. All right, what you want me to do, get down on my knees and say I'm sorry?"

"No." Sweeney said. "Something harder than that—and more practical. Keep your clothes on till I get there. In about ten minutes."

He put the receiver back on the hook. Fifteen minutes later he knocked on the door of Jay Ehlers' room. Sweeney sat down on the bed, lighted a cigarette and looked at Ehlers.

He said, "So you thought I might be the Ripper."

"That wasn't *my* idea, Sweeney. It was the captain's."

"Sure and it was all right for him. Bline didn't know me. He hadn't been a friend of mine for ten years or more. And he sent you and your pal around to bring *me* in—and any cutlery you found around.

"I wasn't home and it was your bright idea to show how smart you are with locks and burgle my room. You didn't follow orders: you exceeded them. And how many drinks have we had together in ten or twelve years?"

Ehlers' face was reddening. He said, "I remember the time you saved my job —you don't have to remind me. All right, so I should have thought twice. But is this leading to something or did you just come up here to get a bawling-out off your chest?"

"It's leading to something. I'm going to give you a chance to wash it out. I'm going to let you open a door for me, a door to a man's office."

"You crazy, Sweeney? Whose?"

"Doc Greene's."

"Can't do it, Sweeney. You're crazy."

"Were you crazy when you opened the door of my place? You did that on your own hook."

"That's different, Sweeney. At least I had orders to exceed. What are you looking for in Greene's office?"

"The same thing. Only I won't bother them unless they're bloodstained and if we get anything on him you can have the credit."

"You don't think Greene really *is* the Ripper, do you?"

"I hope to find out, one way or the other."

"What if we get caught?"

"Then we get caught. We try to talk our way out of it."

Ehlers stared at Sweeney and then shook his head. He said, "I can't, Sweeney. I'd lose my job no matter how much talking we did. And I got a chance to put in for lieutenant within a few months."

"To put in for it but not to make it."

"What do you mean?"

Sweeney said. "It means we're not friends any more, Ehlers. It means you start off on the *Blade's* s.o.b. list, and go on from there. It means you wouldn't get your name in ink if you stopped a bank robbery single-handed but we'll drown you in ink if you spit on the sidewalk."

"Yeah? Damn it, you can't—"

"I can try. I start off tomorrow morning by bringing suit against the police department for entering my room without a warrant, through a locked door, and for petty larceny."

EHLERS tried to laugh. "You couldn't make it stick."

"Of course I couldn't. But don't you think the commissioners would start their own little investigation to see what it was really all about? They'd jump on Bline and Bline would tell them the truth. Lieutenancy hell. You'll be back in harness, pounding pavements so far out there wouldn't be any pavement."

"You wouldn't do that, Sweeney."

Sweeney said, "I thought you wouldn't burgle my room, and I was wrong."

"Where *is* Greene's office?" Ehlers was perspiring slightly.

"Goodman Block, not far from here. I know the building and there won't be any trouble or any danger. I won't take over fifteen minutes inside."

He saw he'd won his point. He said, "And I'll buy you a drink first. Dutch courage, if you're more afraid of Greene than you were of me."

"Sure it was different. I was a friend of yours. Greene isn't. Come on."

The Goodman Block was an old ten-story office building, tenanted mostly by not-too-prosperous lawyers, agents, brokers and headquarters of several bookies and at least one policy ring.

Sweeney had figured it would be the type of building that would be open twenty-four hours a day for those of its tenants who wanted to burn midnight oil and he was right. He and Ehlers walked past on the opposite side of the street and saw that lights still burned in several of the offices. And, through the entrance, they could see that an elevator man was on duty, reading a newspaper.

They kept on walking and Ehlers asked, "Going to take a chance on having him take us up?"

They crossed over. Sweeney said, "We'll try not to use him. We'll wait outside the entrance and out of his sight. We'll be able to hear the bell ring and the elevator start if he gets a call from upstairs and we can get through the lobby without his seeing us."

Ehlers nodded agreement, and they waited quietly outside until ten minutes later, they heard the buzzer of the elevator and the clang of its door closing.

Sweeney picked Greene's room number, 411, off the building directory as they went through the outer hall. They were on the stairway between the second and third floors when the elevator passed on its way down from whatever floor it had serviced.

Fortunately no other office on that floor seemed to be occupied. Ehlers did not have to use particular caution in applying his picklocks. He got the door open in seven minutes.

Inside, they turned on the lights and closed the door. It was a little cubbyhole of an office. One desk, one cabinet, one file, one table, three chairs.

Sweeney shoved his hat back on his head as he looked around. He said, "This won't take long, Jay. Sit down and relax. There isn't any lock on that file."

The bottom drawer of the three-drawer file contained a pair of overshoes, a half-full bottle of whisky and two dusty glasses. The middle drawer was empty.

The top drawer contained correspondence. Apparently Greene didn't make carbons of his own letters. It disgusted Sweeney to find that the correspondence was filed only in approximately chronological order—that there was no separate section or folder for Yolanda.

All he learned was that Greene really did business as a booking agent and did have other clients and get bookings for

them. Not, as far as he could tell, on any big-time circuits or top clubs.

He left the file and tried the cabinet. Stationery supplies on the shelf, an old raincoat hanging on one of the hooks, a portable typewriter case standing on the bottom. He looked in the raincoat's pockets and found nothing but a dirty handkerchief and a pair of month-old theater stubs. He opened the portable typewriter case to make sure that it contained a typewriter and it did.

IT looked pretty much like the one he himself had owned—up to the point on his recent bender when he'd taken it out to sell.

The drawer of the table contained nothing more fascinating than an old hectograph.

Jay asked, "Well, finding anything?"

Sweeney grunted an answerless answer and turned to the desk. On top of it was a blotter pad, a pen set and a telephone. He looked under the blotter pad. There was nothing there. He tried the drawers. Only the left hand top one was locked. He said. "Hey, pal. Your department."

Jay opened the drawer and glanced at his watch. He said, "Snap it up, Bill. You said fifteen minutes and we've been here twenty-three already."

Inside the locked drawer was a ledger and a thick brown envelope marked "Current Contracts."

Sweeney looked at the ledger first but it turned out to be a journal rather than a ledger, not indexed, listing receipts and expenditures in chronological order. He thumbed through it rapidly but saw that he wasn't going to get anything from it.

He took up and opened the envelope marked *Current Contracts.*

There were a dozen of them there, but only one interested Sweeney. That was the contract between El Madhouse, Nick Helmos signing, and Yolanda Lang. The contract called for two hundred dollars a week for the joint services of Yolanda Lang and Devil. But neither Yolanda nor the dog had signed it. The signature was Richard M. Greene.

Sweeney upped an eyebrow. He asked, "Can't she write?"

"Can't who write?"

Sweeney said, "I can understand why the dog didn't sign it."

"Look, I thought you were looking for a razor or a shiv."

Sweeney sighed. What he'd really been looking for most was a small black statuette. But if Doc had that it was at his flat or hotel or wherever he lived, not at his office. And—even if he could find out, at this late hour, where Doc lived—he couldn't crowd his luck by burglarizing it tonight.

And anyway, why couldn't he get Doc Greene off his mind so he could concentrate on other angles? A trip to Brampton, Wisconsin, for instance, to talk to the sculptor—what was his name? Chapman Wilson—who had made Mimi. There was a chance, an off chance, that might lead somewhere.

Or, if he had a lot of money, he might have a New York private detective check Greene's alibi. But that would have to be on Sweeney. The *Blade* would never cover it.

Damn money! He still had a hundred dollars or so out of the checks Wally Krieg had given him—but at the rate it was vanishing he'd barely get by for the ten days before another check would be coming from the *Blade.* Let alone spending any money on the Ripper or on Yolanda.

He read the contract through and frowned. He read three paragraphs again to make sure they really said what he thought they said. They did. He put the contract back in the envelope with the others, put the envelope in the drawer, told Jay to relock it.

Jay said, "Well, find what you were looking for?"

"I don't know what I was looking for, but I found something."

"What?"

"I'm damned if I know," Sweeney said. But he thought he did. He'd found some money if he was willing to take a chance.

JAY grunted as the lock clicked. He said, "Come on, then. Let's clear out of here. We'll argue about it over a drink."

Sweeney turned out the lights and waited in the hallway while Jay relocked the door of Room 411.

They walked very quietly down to the second floor and there Sweeney put his finger to his lips and pressed the button of the elevator signal. They were out of the building and two doors away by

the time the elevator got back down.

Ehlers said, "He'll know somebody pulled a fast one to get out of the building without being seen."

Sweeney said, "Sure he will, but he didn't see us. And he won't chase us."

He didn't.

They waited until they were out of sight around the corner before they flagged a cab. Sweeney asked Jay where he wanted the drink and Jay suggested Burt Meaghan's.

In Burt's place, Sweeney started toward the bar but Ehlers took Sweeney's arm and pulled him toward a table instead. He said, "We got a minute's talking, Bill, in private."

At the table, he glowered at Sweeney until their drinks had come and the waiter had gone. Then he said, "Okay, Bill. I burgled your room and I shouldn't have. But I burgled another place for you to make up, so we're even. Right?"

"Right."

"We're friends?"

"Friends. All is forgiven."

Jay said, "All right, then, we start from there. We're friends now but we're not going to keep on being friends if you hold out on me. I want the pitch. I can't tell Bline or anyone else you were in Greene's office because I'd lose my job for my part in it. You're safe as hell, but believe me, I write *you* off *my* books if you don't tell me."

Sweeney nodded. "Fair enough, Jay. So okay, I've had a strong suspicion that Greene is the Ripper. Psychiatrist or not, I think he's psychopathic. A couple of hours ago at El Madhouse, I got through his guard and he threatened to kill me in front of Cap Bline. I got his goat on purpose to try him out."

"What that got to do with his office?"

Sweeney said, "I hoped I could find something there that would help me make up my mind, pro or con, about Greene. But—word of honor, Jay, I didn't. I didn't find a thing to indicate Greene might be the Ripper. I didn't find a thing to indicate he isn't—except the proof that he really is what he says he is, an agent and manager for night club talent."

"Keep on. What did you find?"

"Something that interested me personally, Jay. I found the contract for Yolanda and Devil versus El Madhouse. And there's something in it I think I can use. But illegally. You wouldn't want to know about it."

"Illegally how?"

"To pick up a piece of change that I need."

"Who from?"

"The guy who owns El Madhouse."

"You mean Nick Helmos or Harry Yahn?"

"Yahn. Nick's just a figurehead."

Jay Ehlers pursed his lips and stared into his glass for a moment. He said, "Careful, Bill. Harry Yahn's a tough mug."

"I know it. But I'm going to bite him. I'm going to make the bite small enough that it won't pay him to use his torpedoes on me."

"You're crazy, Bill."

"I know it. Another drink?"

Ehlers said he'd better turn in, and left. Sweeney wandered over to the pinochle game and watched the play for a few minutes, then went to the bar for one more drink.

CHAPTER XIII

THE drink didn't hurt him, but it didn't do him any good, either. He was afraid, and it annoyed him that he should be afraid. He didn't mind being afraid of the Ripper. That was the Unknown, the Mysterious. But he didn't like being afraid of Harry Yahn. Harry Yahn was a mug. There wasn't anything mysterious about Harry Yahn.

The neon sign said redly, *Tit-Tat-Toe Club*. Sweeney took a deep breath and went in. It was an ordinary bar, only moderately swank, and not as large as Meaghan's place. It was populated at the moment by one bartender and half a dozen customers.

Sweeney went to the bar and decorated it with a bill. The bartender lumbered over and Sweeney said, "Shot. Water chaser." And then before the bartender could turn away, "Is Harry here?"

"Harry who?"

"The name is Sweeney, Bill Sweeney. He knows me."

The bartender turned to the backbar for glass and bottle. As he poured the

shot he said, "Knock on the back door there, around the corner from the john. If Willie knows you, you get in."

"Willie doesn't. But Harry does."

"Tell that to Willie. He can ask Harry. If Harry's here."

Sweeney went back around the corner from the john and knocked on a heavy door. It opened a few inches and a face looked out, the eyes—and they weren't nice eyes—well above the level of Sweeny's head.

Under the eyes was a broken nose and under the nose was a pair of thick lips that said, "Yeah?" and showed broken teeth between them.

Sweeney said, "Willie Harris. I didn't know the Willie on the door was Willie Harris."

"Yeah. What you want?"

"Don't you remember me? I covered three of your fights when I was doing Sports. Bill Sweeney. I was on the *Trib* then."

The door opened wider, eight inches instead of six. Willie said, "Yeah?"

Punchy, Sweeney thought. He said, "Okay, you don't remember all the reporters ever talked to you. Listen, Willie, I want to talk to Harry Yahn. On business. Not the games. He knows me. Tell him Bill Sweeney wants to talk to him. Bill Sweeney."

Short sentences like that, Willie, would get. He said, "Sweeney. I'll see."

Sweeney leaned against the wall and lighted a cigarette. When an inch was gone from the length of the cigarette the door opened again, wider.

Willie looked out to be sure nobody but Sweeney was there and said, "Okay. He'll talk to yah."

He led Sweeney along a short stretch of hallway and pointed to a door. "In there. Go ahead."

Sweeney went in. He said, "Hello, Harry," and Yahn said, "Hi, Sweeney. Sit down."

Harry Yahn, seated at a battered desk that looked as though it had been bought second hand for about ten dollars, looked like Santa Claus without his whiskers.

"Haven't seen you for a long time, Sweeney. Still on the *Blade?*"

Sweeney nodded. "Read that story about Yolanda?"

"Did you write that? I skimmed it but I didn't happen to notice the byline."

Sweeney didn't call him a liar. He merely said, "Yeah, I wrote it. And a damn fine job, if I say so myself—and why shouldn't I, since everybody else does? How about letting me handle the publicity for you for the next five weeks —while Yolanda's playing there?"

YAHN pursed his lips and stared at Sweeney. He said "That would have been a better idea before all this happened. We don't need it now."

He laughed. "You gave it away, Just getting jumped by the Ripper, that's enough to pull them in to see Yolanda. Your eye-witness story tied it up in cellophane. Nope, Sweeney, we got all the publicity we can make use of."

Sweeney shrugged. He said, "It was just an idea. I'll work on it from the other end, then."

"The other end?"

"Doc's end. A little more publicity—and I think I could swing it—and he could book Yolanda for real money in any one of several places with twenty times the take of El Madhouse. He could get two, maybe three thousand a week instead of two hundred. Or instead of four hundred and fifty if you prorate over four weeks the thousand bucks bonus she's getting for going back to work right away."

Harry Yahn's eyes were half closed as though he was bored. He said, "It's an idea. If you can keep the publicity hot for four weeks more, she might pull down that kind of money, or almost that kind."

Sweeney said, "She's worth it right now. I caught your first show at El Madhouse tonight, Harry, and did a little figuring. You ought to have capacity crowds for four weeks. Capacity's two hundred each show, three shows, six hundred a night.

"Let's be conservative as hell and say each mooch pays five bucks and that one buck out of that is clear profit. Six hundred bucks a night profit for a week is four thousand two hundred—times four weeks, sixteen thousand eight hundred dollars."

Yahn said dryly, "We did some business before we had Yolanda."

"Sure, about half as much as you'll be doing for the next four weeks. And with half as much the overhead is higher. Let's say having Yolanda for the next four weeks will bring in about ten

thousand dollars profit that you wouldn't have otherwise. Fair enough?"

"Too high. But what are you leading up to?"

"All right, it's too high. Let's say it's worth seven thousand dollars. Is seven thousand conservative enough?"

All Harry Yahn said was, "I hope you're leading somewhere."

Sweeney stalled deliberately by taking out a cigarette and lighting it. Then he said, "If I do publicity for Greene and Yolanda instead of for El Madhouse, I would advise my friend Doc to book Yolanda elsewhere right away instead of waiting four weeks. But that would cost you seven thousand dollars, Harry, and I wouldn't like to do that, because I've always considered you a friend of mine."

"Yolanda is under contract for four more weeks."

Sweeney smiled. He asked, "Have you read the contract?"

Yahn's eyes opened fully halfway and he looked at Sweeney.

He asked, "Are you representing Greene on this? Did he send you to shake me down?"

"No. And nobody is trying to shake you down, Harry."

Harry Yahn said a nasty word. He said, "It doesn't wash, Sweeney. If there was a hole in that contract that would let Greene book Yolanda elsewhere, he'd be in there pitching. For himself. Why would he tell you about it?"

Sweeney leaned back comfortably in his chair. He said, "He didn't tell me about it. He doesn't know about it yet. He and I had a little bet about how much Yolanda and Devil were getting at El Madhouse and showed me his copy of the contract—with Nick's signature—to win his bet. And he won the bet. But while I had the contract in my hand I happened to read it. Have you?"

"What's the gimmick?"

"Sweet and simple. It must have been an El Madhouse contract, a standard one you give your talent there, because it's full of escape clauses for the party of the first part, which is El Madhouse. But there's also an escape clause for the party of the second part, only it's one that wouldn't be worth a damn in any ordinary case. But this isn't an ordinary case."

"And what is the clause?"

"One that wouldn't be worth the paper it's written on to anybody else, Harry. It provides that the contract may be canceled by the party of the second part by payment of the face amount of the contract—by refunding all moneys received under the contract and paying an amount equal to the balance still to be received under the contract.

"Yolanda's contract is for seven weeks, three down and four to go, at two hundred a week. Doc could buy her out of that for fourteen hundred dollars. And if he could book her elsewhere for two thousand a week for the next four weeks, he and Yolanda would be ahead six and a half thousand dollars—maybe more."

SWEENEY leaned forward and stubbed out his cigarette in the ash tray on Yahn's desk. He said, "The only bad thing about it is that Greene's gain would be your loss."

"Greene doesn't know that's in the contract?"

"Obviously not. He probably read the contract when it was signed, but a clause like that wouldn't have meant anything then." Sweeney stood up. He said, "Well, so long, Harry. Sorry we couldn't see eye to eye on my doing a little publicity for your club."

"Sit down, Sweeney."

Yahn jabbed a button on his desk and Willie Harris was in the doorway. He said, "Yeah, Boss?"

"Come in and close the door, Willie. And just stick around."

"Want me to take this guy apart for you?"

Yahn said, "Not yet, Willie. Not if he sits down."

Sweeney sat down. Willie stood, ready. If you looked at Willie's face you might have got the idea that Willie hadn't taken anybody apart for a long time and had been missing it badly.

Yahn picked up the phone on his desk and dialed a number. He asked for Nick. He said, "Harry, Nick. You got the contract for Yolanda Lang in the safe there. Get it out and put it in your pocket and then call me back. Right away, and privately."

He put the phone back on the hook and looked at Sweeney. Sweeney didn't say anything. Nobody said anything. In three minutes the phone rang.

Sweeney said, "Tell him the sixth paragraph, Harry. That'll save time."

Yahn talked briefly, then listened. He said, "Okay, Nick. Put it back. And don't mention this. . . . Yeah, that's why I had you read it to me. We'll talk it over tomorrow. How's business?" He listened a moment and then said, "Okay," and hung up.

Sweeney asked, "How *is* business?"

Yahn didn't look at him for a moment. Then he did look at him. He said, "Well, what do you want?"

Sweeney said, "I figure handling publicity for you for the month in question ought to be worth about nine hundred bucks."

Harry Yahn didn't look like Santa Claus. He asked, "And if Greene finds out anyway? Happens to reread that contract?"

Sweeney shrugged. "It could happen. There won't be any reason why he would."

Harry Yahn laced his fingers over his stomach and stared a moment at his knuckles. Without looking up, he said, "Willie, go tell Haywood to give you nine hundred. Bring it here." Willie went.

Harry Yahn asked, "How come nine hundred?"

Sweeney grinned. He said, "I figure you for a four-figure man, Harry. I cut just under. If I'd asked for a thousand —I might have got something else."

Harry laughed. He looked like Santa Claus again. He said, "You're a smart so-and-so, Sweeney." He got up and slapped Sweeney on the back. Willie came in with money in his hand. He handed it to Yahn and Yahn handed it to Sweeney without counting it. Sweeney didn't count it either. He put it in his pocket.

Yahn said, "Show him out, Willie. And let him in again any time he comes." Willie opened the door and Sweeney went out to the hall. Willie started after and Yahn called him back for a moment. Then Willie came out and opened the door to the outer hallway.

As Sweeney started through it, Willie's hand, as big as both Sweeney's put together would have been, grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. Willie's other hand, doubled into a fist the size of a football but harder and heavier, slammed into Sweeney's stomach. Willie let go of his shoulder and Sweeney fell, doubled up.

Willie stepped back. He said, "Harry said to give you that, too." He added, as though explaining why Sweeney had got by so luckily, "He said just one, and easy."

He closed the door.

WITHIN a minute Sweeney was able to get to his feet and, a bit doubled over, make it as far as the john. He was sick and after that he was able to stand almost straight.

He leaned back against the wall and took the money out of his pocket and counted it. It was nine hundred all right and it was real.

He'd got all he'd asked for and only one thing more. He'd been lucky, plenty lucky.

He stood outside breathing the cool night air. Not in deep breaths. That would have been unbearably painful. He didn't look around to see if anyone came out after him.

He knew no one would.

He'd been unbelievably lucky. Even that poke in the stomach was a good sign, in a way. Harry wouldn't have told Willie to do that if he'd intended to send some of the boys to work him over seriously, or to shoot him.

Worse things had happened to him—and for less.

A cab came cruising by and he hailed it. He walked to it as an old man walks and it hurt him to pull the door open.

He said, "Drive over to the lake and north along it for a while. I can use some fresh air."

The cab didn't jar him. The gentle motion seemed to help. He felt pretty good with nine hundred bucks in his pocket and no worse price for it than this.

He wasn't angry at Willie. Willie was punchy to begin with and had been carrying out orders—even though he'd enjoyed doing it and would have more enjoyed doing more. He didn't blame Harry Yahn either. After all, it *had* been blackmail.

Harry had let him off easy.

He saw they were passing Diversey Parkway and said, "Guess this is far enough. You can head back now."

"Okay, Mac. Where'll I drop you off?"

"Bughouse Square."

"Bughouse Square at this hour? What the hell you want to do there?"

Sweeney said, "I wish to commune with God."

CHAPTER XIV

BUGHOUSE Square stirred restlessly in the warm night as Sweeney walked into it. The benches were lined with human cargo. There were men sleeping on the grass, too.

The fourth bench on the right on the northeast diagonal walk—that's where God would be if he was there. He was there, looking older and more disreputable than when Sweeney had last seen him.

Sweeney shook God's shoulder gently, then harder, and God blinked and looked up. He said, "Whattahell?"

Sweeney grinned at him. He said, "Don't you know me?"

"No, I don't know you. Beat it before I call a cop."

"Want a drink, God? Badly enough?"

"Badly enough to what?"

Sweeney said, "To reach in your right-hand coat pocket.

Godfrey's hand reached into his pocket, clutched something, and stayed there. His voice was a little hoarse. He said, "Thanks, Sweeney. Haven't had a drink since afternoon. It'd have been a hell of a morning. What time is it?"

"About half-past three."

God swung his feet off the bench. He said, "Good. How's it coming with you, Sweeney?"

"Good."

God pushed himself up off the bench. Sweeney said, "Look at the figure on the corner of that bill before you hand it over."

God pushed himself up off the bench. and looked at a corner of the crumpled bill. He glared at Sweeney. He said, "A damn' capitalist. Showing off."

He thrust his fist back into his pocket and got up off the bench. He walked away without looking back.

Sweeney, grinning, watched him until he'd reached the street—mostly to be sure that nobody had heard or seen and would follow. No one followed.

Sweeney went the opposite direction and caught a cab on Chicago Avenue. It was almost four o'clock when he got home, and he was tired. But before he went to his room he called the Northwestern Station from the phone in the hall.

Yes, they told him, Brampton, Wisconsin, was on the Northwestern Road. The next train that would take him there left at six o'clock, in a little over two hours. The train after that? None that went through Brampton before evening. What time did the six a.m. train get in? One-fifteen in the afternoon.

Sweeney said thanks and put the receiver back on the hook.

In his room he looked longingly at his bed, but he knew that if he lay down to try to get an hour's sleep before he started for the train, he'd never be able to get up when the alarm clock went off.

He looked at the clock and sighed. He looked at Mimi and swore at her for being so important that he was losing sleep to trace down her origin and talk to her creator, little as that was likely to get him.

He went over and turned her around on top of the radio so her back was toward him and he couldn't hear her scream. But even from the back every line of her body showed terror. He felt for her so strongly that, for a moment, he contemplated euthanasia. But even if he did break her there would be a gross minus one of her still screaming somewhere.

And two in Chicago. One on his radio. The other in the hands of the Ripper.

WEARILY—and very gingerly because of his tender abdomen—he undressed. He bathed, shaved and put on clean clothes, decided he wouldn't have to take anything with him, and left for the station. He would be too early but he wanted to allow time for a couple of drinks. Not *as* drinks, but because with them he ought to be able to sleep on the train.

He got to the station at a quarter to six, hoping that the train would be loading by then, and it was. Luckily there was a chair car on the train and the ticket agent sold him a ticket for it and said that he wouldn't need a reservation.

He picked the most comfortable looking seat in the car, sat down carefully, and put his ticket in the band of his hat so the conductor wouldn't have to wake him. He sprawled out his legs and put his hat, ticket side up, over the bruised portion of his anatomy. It was a lightweight panama so it didn't hurt too much.

He was asleep almost the minute he closed his eyes. He opened them briefly a couple of hours later and found the train pulling out of a station. It was Milwaukee and it was raining. When he opened his eyes again it was a few minutes after noon, the train was in Rhinelander and the sun was shining. And he was as hungry as a horse.

He found the diner and ate the biggest meal he'd eaten in weeks. And finished his second cup of coffee just in time to get off at Brampton.

He went into the station and looked in the phone book; no Chapman Wilson was listed. Sweeney frowned and walked over to the ticket window. He asked, "You happen to know where in town Chapman Wilson lives?"

"Chapman Wilson?"

"Yes."

"Never heard of him."

"Thanks."

Sweeney left the station on the side opposite the tracks and took a look at Brampton. About five thousand population, he estimated. In a town that size it shouldn't be too hard to locate someone, even if they didn't have a phone.

He was already, he found, on the main street—the business district, about four blocks long, started immediately to his left. He went into the first store he came to and asked about Chapman Wilson. He drew a blank. And in the second, the third, and the fourth. Not to mention the fifth and sixth.

The seventh place was a tavern and he ordered a drink before he asked his question. When the drink came he asked. The drink was good but the answer wasn't.

Sweeney swore to himself as the bartender moved off. Could he have misunderstood the man he'd talked to at the Ganslen Art Company? No, he'd said it clearly enough—"Fellow by the name of Chapman Wilson, lives in Brampton, Wisconsin. He modeled it in clay."

At least he was sure of the Chapman Wilson. Could he have misunderstood the Brampton part?

He motioned the bartender over. He asked, "Is there any other town in Wisconsin that has a name that sounds like Brampton?"

"Huh? Oh, I see what you mean. Let's see. There's Boyleston, up near Duluth."

"Not close enough."

"Stoughton? Burlington? Appleton? And there's a Milton, but the full name is Milton Junction."

Sweeney shook his head slowly. He said, "You forgot Wisconsin Rapids and Stevens Point."

Sweeney took a meditative sip from his glass. He wondered if he could raise anyone by phone at the Ganslen Art Company in Louisville. Probably not on a Saturday afternoon.

SWEENEY, the rest of his life, was never proud of it, but it was the bartender who saved the day. He asked, "What's this Chapman Wilson do?"

"Sculptor. Artist and sculptor."

For seconds nothing happened. Then the bartender said, "I'll be damned. You must mean *Charlie* Wilson."

Sweeney stared at him. He said, "Don't stop there, Esmeralda. Go on. Does he model little statuettes?"

The bartender laughed. "That's the guy. Crazy Charlie."

Sweeney gripped the edge of the bar. He said, "What do you mean, Crazy Charlie? Crazy Charlie? Crazy, as in *razor?*"

"Huh? Razor? Oh, you mean what *started* him. It was a knife, not a razor."

"A blonde," said Sweeney. "A beautiful blonde?"

"You mean the dame? Yeah, mister, she was both of those. Purtiest thing in town. Until she got attackted with that knife."

Sweeney closed his eyes and counted up to two slowly. It was too good to be true—and he had been about to leave town and go back to Chicago.

He said, "You mean *attackted*, as in *Ripper?*"

"Yeah. Like that Chicago business on the radio."

"You are not referring, by any chance, to a small black statuette? You mean a real woman was attacked up here?"

"Sure. A blonde, like the radio said all the dames in Chicago were."

"When?"

"Four years ago. While I was sheriff."

"While you were sheriff?"

"Yeah. I was sheriff up to two years ago. Bought this place then and couldn't keep up both, so two years ago I didn't run."

"And you handled the Ripper case?"

"Yeah."

Sweeney said, "I am proud to meet you. My name is Bill Sweeney."

The bartender stuck a big paw across the bar. "Glad to know you. My name is Henderson."

Sweeney shook the hand. "Sweeney," he said, "of the Chicago *Blade*. You're just the man I was looking for, Sheriff."

"Ex-sheriff."

"Look, Sheriff, is there any way we can talk privately for a little while without you having to interrupt yourself?"

"Well—I don't know. Saturday afternoon and all that."

"I'll buy a bottle of the most expensive champagne you got and we'll split it while we talk."

"Well—I guess I can get the frau to take over for ten or fifteen minutes. We live upstairs. Only let's split a pint of Haig and Haig instead. The champagne I got isn't very good and anyway it'd take time to ice it."

"Haig and Haig it is." Sweeney put a bill on the bar.

Henderson rang up money and gave Sweeney a little back. He took a bottle from the back-bar, put it in his hip pocket, and said, "Come on. I'll get Ma."

He led Sweeney up the stairs and into a kitchen. He said, "Guess we can talk best here, and glasses and everything are handy. Want anything to mix it with?"

"Haig and Haig? Don't be silly, Sheriff."

HENDERSON grinned. "Sit down. I'll get glasses and open this."

He came back with glasses and the opened bottle and poured a generous shot for each of them. Sweeney lifted his. "To crime."

"To crime," Henderson said. "How're things in Chicago?"

"Ripping," Sweeney said. "But let's get to Brampton. First, let's make sure this Chapman Wilson I'm talking about and your Crazy Charlie are one and the same person. Tell me about him."

"His name is Charlie Wilson. He's an artist and a sculptor—guess what money he makes out of it is mostly from the stuff he models. He sells them to some companies that make statuettes and stuff. Arty little things. Guess he doesn't sell many paintings."

"That's the guy," Sweeney said. "Probably uses Chapman as a professional first name. Chapman Wilson sounds better than Charlie Wilson. But how crazy is he?"

"Not really. When he's sober, he's just—eccentric. He's pretty much of a lush, though, and when he gets tanked up—well, I've had to kick him out of my place half a dozen times. Mostly for trying to pick fights." Henderson grinned.

"And he's about five feet two and weighs about a hundred and ten pounds soaking wet. Anybody takes a real poke at him, they'd probably kill him, and yet he's always wanting to start a fight when he gets tanked. A real screwball."

"Does he make a good thing out of his work?"

"Hell, no. Doubt if he makes five hundred bucks in a year. He lives in a little shack out at the edge of town that nobody else'd live in. Gets it for a few bucks a month. And proud as all hell—thinks he's a great artist."

"Maybe he is."

"Then why doesn't he make some money out of it?"

Sweeney opened his mouth to mention Van Gogh and Modigliani and a few others who'd been great artists and had made less than five hundred bucks a year out of it. Then he remembered his audience and that time was flying.

He asked, instead, "And Charlie Wilson is now running around loose? In Brampton?"

"Sure. Why not? He's harmless."

"Well, this Ripper business. How does Charlie Wilson tie in with that?"

"He shot him."

"You mean Charlie shot the Ripper or the Ripper shot Charlie?"

"Charlie shot the Ripper."

Sweeney took a deep breath. "But the Ripper got away?"

"Hell, no. Killed him dead as hell. Charlie got him with a shotgun from about two yards away. Blew a hole through him you could stick your head through. Only good thing Charlie ever did in his life. He was kind of a hero around town for a while."

"Oh," said Sweeney. He felt disappointed. A dead Ripper wasn't going to be much help to him. He took another sip of the Scotch. "Let's start it from the other end. Who was the Ripper?"

"His name was Pell, Howard Pell.

A homicidal maniac who broke out of the county insane aslyum—that's about twenty miles from here. Let's see, it was four years ago. I told you wrong when I said three because it was in the first year of my second two-year term."

"And what happened?"

"Well, this Pell broke out of the asylum. Killed two guards with his bare hands. He was a big guy, built like an ox. Bigger than I am. Outside, the siren hadn't gone off yet and he flagged a car and the damn fool driver stopped to pick him up. Guy named Rogers. Pell got in the car and killed Rogers. Strangled him."

"Didn't he use a knife at all?"

"Didn't have one yet. But he got one all right, then and there. This Rogers was a canvasser selling a line of aluminum kitchenware. But he had some sidelines and one of them was a carving set. The knife in it was a beauty, ten inches long and an inch wide, sharp as hell. He tried it out on Rogers, even though Rogers was already dead. Want the details on that?"

"Not right now," Sweeney said. "But I could use another drink. A short one."

"Sorry." Henderson poured it. "Well, he operated on Rogers and threw his body out of the car into the ditch. Not all at once, y'understand."

SWEENEY shuddered slightly and took a quick sip of the Scotch. He said, "I'd just as soon not understand too thoroughly. Go on."

"Well, this was about eight o'clock in the evening, just after dark. Anyway, that's when they found the two guards dead and Pell gone from the asylum. They called me quick—along with sheriffs of other counties around, and local police officers and everybody and meanwhile what guards they could spare fanned outward from the asylum in cars to start the search.

"Well, right off they found what was left of this guy Rogers, and the car tracks showed 'em what'd happened, so they knew Pell had a car. They cut back to the asylum and phoned me and everybody that Pell would be in a car and to set up roadblocks and get him.

"We got the roadblocks up quick but he fooled us. He did head toward Brampton all right, but a little outside of town he turned the car into a side road and left it there. And he came in across the fields on foot, so he got through us. Even though between us, me and the police chief here in Brampton, we had every road guarded by that time. Within fifteen minutes of the time we got the call from the asylum."

"Fast work," Sweeney said, approvingly.

"Goddam tooting it was fast work but it didn't do any good, because he got through us on foot. The next day we could trace back exactly the way he went from the car because he had so much blood on him.

"Y'see he cut up Rogers right in the driver's seat of the car and then had to get there himself to drive the car, and he was kind of covered with blood all over. He even had it in his hair and on his face and his shoes were soaked with it. And looking like that, and with the bloody knife in his hand, was how he come across Bessie taking a shower."

"Who is Bessie?"

"Who *was* Bessie. Bessie Chapman, Charlie's younger sister. She was about eighteen then, maybe nineteen. She was staying with him then because she was sick. She didn't live in Brampton. She had a job in St. Louis, hatcheck girl in a night club or something, but she got sick and broke and came back to stay with Charlie. Their parents had been dead ten years or so.

"Guess she didn't know when she came back how broke he was or she wouldn't've come—but she probably, through the letters he'd written her, thought he was doing pretty good. Anyway she was sick and needed help, and what happened to her here in Brampton didn't help her any, I guess. Maybe it'd been better if she'd been killed right out."

"This Pell attacked her?"

"Well, yeah and no. He didn't actually lay a hand on her, but it drove her nuts and she died later. It was this way. That shack of Charlie's is just one fair-sized room that he uses to live in and work in both and that's where they lived.

"But there's another littler shack, sort of like a tool shed, out in back of it on the lot. The can's in there and Charlie fixed up a shower in there too. In one corner, just a makeshift kind of shower.

"Anyway—this would've been about half past eight—the kid sister, Bessie,

decides to take a shower and goes out of the shack and along the path to the shed in a bathrobe and slippers, see? And that must've been just about the time Pell is coming to their yard, cutting into town and keeping off the streets and the road, so he sees her go into the shed.

"And with the carving knife in his hand, he goes up and yanks the shed door open."

"Wouldn't there be a catch on it?"

"I told you he was big as an ox. He just yanks it open so hard the hook pulls off. And Bessie is standing there naked under the shower, getting ready to reach up and turn it on. And he takes a step inside toward her, waving the knife. How's about another drink?"

"An inspiration," said Sweeney.

Henderson poured two.

He said, "You can't blame her for going nuts, can you? Sick to begin with and seeing *that*. Guy over six feet, two-twenty pounds, in a nuthouse uniform that started out being gray but that ended up being red, with blood in his hair and on his face, and coming at her with a ten-inch carving knife. God."

Sweeney could picture it. He'd seen Mimi.

He took a sip of Scotch. He asked, "What happened?"

CHAPTER XV

HENDERSON said, "Well, I was two blocks away and I heard her scream and keep on screaming. It was maybe five minutes before I got there—and of course it was all over long before that—but she was still screaming then.

"What happened was, the first scream she let out Charlie grabbed for his shotgun—he's got one because he does a lot of hunting, not so much for fun like most of us but because he gets some of his eating that way.

"Anyway he ran out the back door of the shack and saw the guy with the knife in the doorway of the shed and past him he could see Bessie back in the corner under the shower that wasn't turned on yet, screaming her head off.

"So he runs toward the dor—it's only about ten feet from the shack to the shed—and runs a little to one side so he can shoot Pell without shooting Bessie too. From right outside the door he lets go with the shotgun and, like I said, puts a hole through Pell that you could stick your head through."

"But *must* I?" Sweeney asked. At the blank look on the ex-sheriff's face, he changed his question. "And Bessie Chapman went crazy?"

"Yeah, and died about six-seven months later. Crazy as a bedbug. No, not in the asylum near here—that's for incurables. And for a while they thought they could cure Bessie. It was in some little private sanitarium downstate near Beloit.

"There was a lot of publicity on the case and one of the doctors down there got interested. He had a new treatment and thought he could cure Bessie and took her on as a charity case. But it didn't work—she died six-seven months later."

Sweeney asked, "And Charlie? Did he go off the beam then or was he crazy before that?"

"Like I told you, he isn't really crazy. But he was off the beam before that and I guess that didn't make him any worse. He's an artist. That's crazy to begin with, isn't it?"

Sweeney said, "I guess it is. Where is this shack of his?"

"On Cuyahoga Street; that's eight blocks west of here, almost at the edge of town in that direction. I dunno the number, if there's a number on it, but it's a block and a half north of Main Street—that's the street you're on now—and there are only a few houses in that block and his is the only one-room shack and it's painted green. You can't miss it. Another drink? There's still a couple left in here.'

Sweeney said, "Why not?"

There didn't seem to be any reason why not, so Henderson poured them and they killed the bottle.

Sweeney stared moodily into his. This had looked so good less than half an hour ago. He'd found a Ripper. Only the Ripper was dead, four and a quarter years dead, with a hole in him that Sweeney could stick his head through if he wanted to, only he didn't want to, especially with the Ripper four and a quarter years dead.

Sweeney took a sip of his drink and glared at Henderson as though it was Henderson's fault.

Then he thought of a new angle. It didn't seem likely. He asked, "This Charlie Wilson. He ever out of town?"

"Charlie? Not that I know of. Why?"

"Just wondering if he ever got to Chicago."

"Naw, he couldn't afford train fare to Chicago. And besides, he didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"Didn't commit your three Ripper murders. Our new sheriff—Lanny Pedersen—was talking about them the other night downstairs. Naturally, we thought of the coincidence of our having had a Ripper here, even if he was dead, and I asked Lanny what about Charlie, if maybe Charlie could have—uh—sort of got the idea from what he saw, or something.

"And he said he'd thought of that and that he hadn't thought so or anything but that he'd checked with Charlie's next door neighbors out on Cuyahoga Street and Charlie hadn't been out of town at all. They see him every day and most of the day because he does most of his painting or sculping outdoors in his yard.

Sweeney took another sip. "And this Pell," he asked. "There's no doubt but that it was Pell that Charlie shot? I mean, the shotgun didn't mess him up so he couldn't be recognized or anything."

"Nope, didn't touch his face. No doubt about identification at all, even if he didn't have the bloody uniform on and everything. Shotgun blast hit him in the chest. Guess he must have heard Charlie at the door and turned around. Blew a hole in his chest that you could put your head through."

Sweeney said, "Thanks just the same," and stood up. "I guess it was a bust, Sheriff. I had an idea I could tie your Ripper case up with ours, but it doesn't look like it can be done with Charlie alibied and everybody else concerned dead. And anyway, you thought of it before I did. Well, thanks anyway."

He waited while Henderson washed out the glasses they'd used and hid the empty bottle at the bottom of the garbage pail and then went downstairs with him and Henderson relieved his wife at the bar. She glared at him before she went back upstairs and he had a feeling that Henderson's precautions with the glasses and the bottle had been futile. Even if she didn't find the bottle, she'd know that there had been one.

THERE were only four customers in the bar and Sweeney unhappily set up a drink around for them before he went out. He had only a short beer for himself.

He trudged back to the railroad station and asked what time the next train left for Chicago.

"Eleven-fifteen," the agent told him.

Sweeney glanced up at the clock and saw it was only half past four. He asked, "Is there an airport around where I can get a plane for Chi?"

"A plane for Chicago? Guess the nearest place is Rhinelander. You can get one there."

"How do I get to Rhinelander?"

"By train," the agent said. "The eleven-fifteen. That's the next train headed that way."

Sweeney swore. He bought a ticket for Chicago on the eleven-fifteen and had the agent wire to reserve him a lower berth. Anyway, he'd get to Chicago early Sunday morning with a good night's sleep under his belt.

He sat down on a bench in the station and wondered how he'd ever manage to kill over six and a half hours without drinking too much if he drank at all. And if he did that he'd probably miss the eleven-fifteen and that would ruin tomorrow, which was his last day on his own before he had to go back to the *Blade*.

He sighed, and decided that he might as well see this Charlie-Chapman Wilson while he was here anyway and had to do something to kill the time.

But he'd lost all enthusiasm for it now. It had sounded so beautiful when the ex-sheriff had opened up about a Crazy Charlie named Wilson and a blonde being attacked by a Ripper. It had sounded so good that the anti-climax made him wish he'd never heard of Brampton, Wisconsin.

Well, he still had Mimi as a lead, but he'd have to trace her the other way, forward instead of backward, and find the Ripper who had a copy of her. Tracing her back here had led only to a coincidence—but a coincidence that was a beautiful confirmation of the idea

that Mimi would appeal strongly to a Ripper. She'd been born, in a sense, through contact with a Ripper. Only, alas, not the one who was now operating in Chicago.

Well, he'd still talk to this Chapman Wilson. And if Wilson was a lush, a bottle would be the best way to get him to talk. He bought a bottle, a fifth this time, at a liquor store on his way down Main Street to Cuyahoga and the small green shack with a shed behind it. But there wasn't any answer to his knock at the door.

He tried the door of the shed but there wasn't any answer there either. The door of the shed was unlocked—it was fixed to lock only from the inside. Sweeney pushed it open and looked in. Inside, one corner had been partitioned off with beaverboard and was obviously a toilet. In the opposite back corner, sans curtains or partition, was the crude shower the ex-sheriff had described.

A string hanging beside the door operated to turn on the light, a bare bulb in the middle of the ceiling. Sweeney turned it on, and he could see in the far wall, between the shower and the toilet, the place where the charge of the shotgun must have hit, and gone through; there was a square of beaverboard nailed over it now.

He looked back at the shower corner and shivered a little, picturing a full-scale model of his Screaming Mimi—only in soft white instead of hard glossy black—standing there screaming, her slender, rounded arms thrust out in ineffable terror, warding off— Sweeney turned out the light and pulled the door shut. He didn't like his mental picture of what she had been warding off. No wonder the poor girl had gone fatally mad.

He went back to the front of the shack and knocked again. Then he went to the house next door and knocked. A man with handlebar mustaches answered the door and Sweeney asked if he knew whether Charlie Wilson was gone for the day or would be home soon.

"Oughta be home soon, I guess. Saw him walk toward town couple hours ago. He always gets home time to fix his own supper; he wouldn't be eatin' downtown."

Sweeney thanked him and went back to the front of the shack. It was five o'clock and already beginning to be dusk. He might just as well wait here as do anything else he could think of.

He sat down on the wooden step and put his package—the bottle—down on the grass beside the step, resisting an impulse to open it before Charlie came home.

It was six o'clock, and twilight, when he saw Charlie coming. He recognized him easily from Henderson's description—five foot two, a hundred ten pounds dripping wet. He looked even lighter than that, possibly because he wasn't dripping wet, not on the outside, anyway. From the way he walked he was not suffering from an internal drought.

He could have been, Sweeney decided as he turned in at the gate and came closer, anywhere between twenty-five and forty-five. He had straw-colored uncombed hair and wore no hat. His clothes were rumpled and he hadn't shaved for at least two days. His eyes were glassy.

Sweeney stood up. "Mr. Wilson?"

"Yeh." The top of his head was just level with Sweeney's chin.

Sweeney stuck out a hand. He said, "Sweeney. Like to talk to you about a certain statuette you made. Ganslen's number SM-one, a girl screaming—"

CHARLIE WILSON'S hand came out too but it passed Sweeney's instead of shaking it. And the hand was doubled up into a fist that landed in Sweeney's s o r e stomach. Sweeney's stomach screamed silently and tried to crawl through his backbone.

Sweeney himself said something inarticulate and bent almost double, which put his chin in handy reach for an opponent Charlie Wilson's height. Charlie's fist hit his chin and knocked him off balance but didn't straighten him up.

Nothing would have persuaded Sweeney to straighten up, just then—nothing at all. He didn't really feel the poke on his chin at all because the pain in his stomach was too intense. You don't feel a mosquito bite when you've got your leg in a beartrap.

Sweeney staggered back, still doubled up, and sat down on the doorstep again, his hands protectively clasped over his stomach. He didn't care if Charlie Wilson kicked him in the chin as long as he didn't touch his stomach again. He

didn't care about anything in the world except protecting his stomach. Still with his hands over it, he leaned sideways and started to retch.

When he recovered sufficient interest to look up, Charlie Wilson, arms akimbo, was staring down at him with an utterly amazed expression on his face. His voice matched his expression. He said, "I'll be damned. I licked you."

Sweeney groaned. "Thanks," he said.

"Didn't really hurt you, did I?"

Sweeney said, "It feels lovely. Everything's wonderful." He retched again.

"Didn't mean to hurt you, really. I always get licked whenever I take a poke at anybody, so I try to take as good a poke or two as I can get in before it happens. Hey, want a drink? I've got some gin inside. Inside the hovel, I mean, not inside me. That's whiskey."

"What's whiskey?"

"Inside me. Want a shot of gin?"

Sweeney picked up the wrapped fifth of whiskey from beside the step. "If you can open that—"

Wilson got it open by using the rough edge of a key on the celluloid and turning the cap with his teeth. He handed the bottle to Sweeney and Sweeney took a long drink. Sweeney handed back the bottle.

"You might as well have one too. To the start of a beautiful friendship. And just what *did* start it?"

"I hate reporters."

"Oh," said Sweeney. He thought back. "And just what gave you the idea I'm a reporter?"

"You're the third in a week. And who else would—" He broke off, a puzzled look coming into his eyes.

Sweeney said, "Who else indeed? But let's start over again, and differently. You're Chapman Wilson?"

"Yes."

"My name is Sweeney—Mortimer Sweeney. I'm with the Ganslen Art Company. Of Louisville."

Charlie Wilson put a hand to his forehead. He said, "Oh, my God!"

"You may well say it."

"I'm sorry. Look, can you stand up yet? So I can get the door open. Don't—I've got a better idea. I'll go around back and open it from the inside and then I can help you in."

He went around the side of the shack, looking considerably more sober than when he'd first come up the walk. Sweeney heard a back door being opened and then the front door. It nudged his back.

Wilson's voice said, "Sorry, I forgot it opens out. You'll have to stand up anyway to let me get it open. Can you?"

Sweeney stood up. Not all the way up but far enough for him to move to one side and then go in when the door opened. He made it to the nearest seat, which was a camp stool without a back. That didn't matter because he didn't feel inclined to lean back anyway.

The light was on, a single overhead bulb as in the shed back of the shack. Wilson was washing two glasses at the sink in one corner. The sink was piled high with dishes but there weren't any on the shelves above the sink; obviously Wilson washed dishes when and as he needed them for use rather than the more orthodox system of washing them and putting them away each time after they'd been used.

He poured a generous slug from Sweeney's bottle into each of the glasses and came over with one of them for Sweeney.

Sweeney took a sip and looked around him. The walls, every available inch of them, were hung with unframed canvasses. There were landscapes vaguely in the manner of Cezanne that Sweeney rather liked and there were abstractions that looked interesting. Sweeney wasn't enough of an expert to know how good they were but he could tell that they weren't bad. There didn't seem to be any portraits or figure work.

AT one side of the room a sculptor's stand held a partially finished twelve-inch statuette of what appeared to be a gladiator.

Wilson had followed Sweeney's gaze. He said, "Don't look at that. It isn't finished and it's horrible anyway." He walked across the room and threw a cloth across the clay figure, then sat down on the edge of the cot across from Sweeney.

Sweeney had begun to feel better. He said, "It's not bad—the gladiator, I mean. But I'd say oil is your real medium and that the statuettes are pot-boilers. Right?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Sweeney. Of course if you weren't from Ganslen I'd say you were exactly right. By the way,

what is your job there?"

Sweeney had been thinking about that. He didn't know anything about the set-up of the Louisville art firm and, more important, he didn't know how much Wilson knew. Wilson might even have visited there and be pretty familiar with the officers. Besides, he didn't want to do any buying or rejecting.

He said, "I'm just a salesman for them. But when the boss heard I was passing through Brampton on this trip he told me to stop off and see you."

"I'm sorry as hell, Mr. Sweeney, that I—uh—"

"That's all right," Sweeney lied. "But first, what's this business about two other reporters—I mean, two reporters having been here to see you? From what papers and why?"

"From St. Paul papers. Or maybe one was from Minneapolis. It was about that statuette you mentioned, your SM-one. That's why I thought you were another reporter, I guess. What was it *you* wanted to ask about that?"

Sweeney said, "Let's get it straight first about what these oth—these reporters wanted to know about SM-one."

Wilson frowned. "On account of those Ripper murders in Chicago they wanted to do a rehash of my shooting of the maniac I had to shoot here about four or five years ago. Both of them knew about the statuette I made of Bessie, so I guess they must have talked to Sheriff Pedersen before they came out here."

"Had either of them seen it or a photo of it?"

"I guess not. What they wanted to know mostly was what company I'd sold it to. If they'd seen one they could have found what company made it. You stamp your name under the base."

"Then the sheriff here knew you'd made such a statuette but didn't know what company you sold to?"

"That's right. And he never saw it. I got a crying jag about it one night when he jugged me for disorderly conduct."

Sweeney nodded and felt relieved. Then the St. Paul-Minneapolis papers didn't have the important part of the story about Screaming Mimi. They had the inconsequential part—the part he'd learned today from the ex-sheriff—but they didn't know the important, the *all*-important, fact that Chicago's Ripper had a copy.

And they didn't have even a photo of the statuette. All they had was a rehash of an old local story. It would make their own papers but wouldn't go out on the AP and UP wires to spoil Sweeney's angle.

Wilson leaned back against the wall behind the cot he was sitting on and crossed his legs. He said, "But what is it Ganslen sent you to talk to me about, Mr. Sweeney?"

"Something that I'm afraid won't work if you don't like the idea of publicity for the statuette and how it originated. You see, we're taking a loss on that particular number as things stand. We made a gross of them to try them out—and we'd have lost money if the whole gross had sold but had sold too slowly to justify our making it in quantity. It's even worse than that. We're stuck with about a hundred out of the original gross; it just turned out not to have any general appeal at all."

Wilson nodded. "I told your buyer that when he took it. It's one of those things. You like it a lot or else you don't like it at all."

"How did you feel about it as an artist? How did it strike you?"

"I—I don't know, Mr. Sweeney. I should never have done it, and I should never have sold it. It's too—personal. God, the way Bessie looked standing there screaming, the way I saw her through the doorway past that—

"Well, the picture just stuck in my mind until I finally had to do it to get it *off* my mind. It was haunting me up to last year. I had to either paint it or model it and I'm not good at figure work with the brush so I modeled it. And once I did that I should have destroyed it.

"But I'd just finished it when Mr. Roberts stopped in on one of his buying trips and he liked it. I didn't want to sell it to him but he insisted, and I needed the money so badly I couldn't turn it down. It was like selling my own sister. It *was*, in a way. I felt so lousy about it I stayed drunk a week, so the money didn't do me any good anyway."

SWEENEY said, "I can see how you must have felt about it."

"But I told Mr. Roberts then I didn't want any publicity about it and he promised he wouldn't give the story of it to anybody to try to sell more of

them. So why does he send you now to open the subject again?"

Sweeney cleared his throat. "Well—he thought that, under new circumstances, you might change your mind. But I can see you still feel pretty strongly about it, so I won't even try to persuade you."

"Thanks, Mr. Sweeney. But what new circumstances do you mean?"

"The same thing those St. Paul reporters meant. You see, right now, there's a Ripper actively operating in Chicago and it's a big story—not just local but a coast-to-coast big crime story, about the biggest thing since Dillinger.

"Right now, while the iron's hot, we could sell a flock of them if we could cash in on *that* publicity, advertising them—and honestly—as a statuette of a woman being attacked by a Ripper, and from life. From the memory of a sculptor who'd actually seen the attack—and prevented it. But we'd have to release the whole story to do that."

"I see what you mean. And it would mean a little extra, I guess, in royalties to me. But—no, I guess not. As I said, I'm sorry I sold it at all and to drag poor Bessie before the public again—How's about another drink? It's your whiskey."

"Ours," said Sweeney. "You know, Charlie, I like you. Not that I thought I would after the way you greeted me."

Wilson poured refills. He said, "I'm really sorry about that. Honestly. I thought you were another of those goddam reporters like the first two and I'd made up my mind I wasn't going to *take* another one of them."

He sat down again, glass in hand. "What I like about you best is your not trying to talk me into letting Ganslen release publicity on it. I might weaken if you did. God knows I need money—and God knows it wouldn't do me any good if I got it that way.

"Even with the prices you get for your statuettes you might sell thousands of them with a story like that back of them. And with that much money—"

Sweeney asked curiously, "How much money? I mean, Roberts didn't happen to mention exactly what the arrangements with you were on the deal."

"The usual. Usual for me, anyway; I don't know what kind of a contract they give their other sculptors but on all the statuettes they buy from me, it's a hundred bucks down and that covers all they sell up to a thousand copies—that's the point Roberts says they start to break even on a number and over that they show a profit. Is that right?"

"Close enough," Sweeney said.

"So if they would sell two or three thousand copies, I'd have one or two thousand coming in royalties—and that hasn't happened yet. And God help me if it did—in this case. I told you I stayed drunk for a week on the hundred bucks I got out of selling that figure of Bessie the first time.

"Well, if I cashed in a thousand or two out of the story of it getting dragged through the papers again—and after she's dead, at that—well, I'd go on such a drunk I probably wouldn't live through it. Even if I did the money wouldn't. I'd be broke and broken and hate myself the rest of my life."

Sweeney found he could stand up, not too certainly. He stuck his hand across the space betwen them. He said, "Shake, Charlie. I like you."

"Thanks. I like you, Sweeney. Another drink? Of your whiskey?"

"*Our* whiskey. Sure, Charlie. Say, which *is* your first name, Charlie or Chapman?"

"Charlie. Chapman Wilson was Bessie's idea. Thought it sounded more like an artist. She was a swell gal, Sweeney. A little screwy sometimes."

"Aren't we all?"

"I guess I am. They call me Crazy Charlie around here."

"Around Chicago they probably call me Crazy Sweeney." He picked up his glass. "Shall we drink to craziness?"

Charlie looked at him somberly for a moment. He said, "Make it to our kind of craziness, Sweeney."

"What oth—oh! To our kind of craziness, Charlie."

They touched glasses and drank, and Sweeney sat back down.

CHARLIE stared into his empty glass. He said, "*Real* craziness is something horrible, Sweeney. That homicidal maniac, covered with blood and the carving knife in his hand. I still get nightmares about his face, when he turned away from Bessie and looked at me as he heard me coming.

"And Bessie—she was such a swell

girl. And to see her go to pieces—well, you can hardly call it going to pieces. That implies something gradual. And she went wild-crazy all at once from that horrible experience.

"Why, we had to hold her down to get clothes on her. She was stark naked when—but you know that, of course; you've seen the statuette. I—I think it's a good thing that she died, Sweeney. *I'd* rather be dead than insane, really insane. Like she was."

He dropped his head into his hands.

Sweeney said, "Tough. And she was only nineteen."

"Twenty, then. She was twenty-one when she died in the asylum almost four years ago. And she was swell. Oh, she wasn't any angel. She was kind of wild. Our parents died ten years ago when I was twenty-four and Bessie was fifteen. An aunt of ours tried to take her but she ran off to St. Louis. But she kept in touch with me.

"And when she got in trouble five years later, it was me that she came to. She was—well, that business with the maniac gave her a miscarriage and took care of that." He looked up. "Maybe she's better off. Life can be a hell of a mess."

Sweeney got up and patted Charlie on the shoulder. He said, "Quit thinking about it, kid." He poured them each a drink and put Charlie's glass into Charlie's hand.

And once he was up he wandered around the room, looking at the canvases on the wall, studying them more closely. They weren't bad—they weren't bad at all.

Charlie said, "We were really close, a lot closer than brother and sister usually are. We never lied to each other about anything. She told me everything she did in St. Louis, every man she'd had anything to do with. She was a waitress first, then a pony in a chorus line in a cheap burlecue. That's what she was doing when she found she was pregnant and came here. And then that escaped loonie—"

"Quit talking about it," Sweeney ordered gruffly.

"He died too quickly. If I'd've shot his legs off instead of shooting at his chest, I could have taken that carving knife and— Oh, hell, I wouldn't have, anyway." He shook his head slowly.

"Anyway, at that range," he said, "it put a hell of a big hole in him. Big enough you could stick your head through it."

Sweeney sighed and sat down. He said, "Look, Charlie, forget it. Let's talk about painting."

Charlie nodded slowly. They talked about painting, got off onto music, got back to painting again. Sweeney's bottle emptied itself and they started on Charlie's gin. It was pretty horrible gin. After a while Sweeney found difficulty focusing his eyes on paintings they were discussing but his mind stayed clear.

Clear enough anyway to know that he was enjoying the evening and having some of the best conversation he'd had in a long time. He wasn't sorry any more that he'd come to Brampton. He liked Charlie. Charlie was his own breed of cat. And Charlie could hold his liquor too, remarkably well. His tongue got thickish but he talked sense.

So, for that matter, did Sweeney. And he had sense enough to keep an eye on his watch. When it was ten-fifteen, an hour before his train time, he told Charlie he'd better leave.

"Driving?"

"No. Got a reservation on the eleven-fifteen. But it's quite a hike to the station. I've had a swell evening."

"You won't have to hike. There's a bus runs back and forth the length of Main Street. You can catch it on the corner a block and a half down. I'll walk down with you."

The cool night air felt good and began to sober him up.

He liked Charlie and wanted to do something for him. More than that, he suddenly saw *how* he could do something for him. He said, "Charlie, I got an idea how I can get you those royalties on the Scream—on SM-one, without that publicity you don't want. It'll be publicity for the statuette itself but it won't have to bring either you or your sister into the picture at all."

"Well, if you can do that—"

They were at the corner and Charlie was waiting with him until the bus came along.

"Sure, I can do it. Just on the Chicago angle. Look, Charlie, I know something nobody else knows—and it'll give you a flock of publicity for that statuette in its own right, apart from the way it was conceived and executed. Your name

or your sister's won't have to come in at all."

"If you can keep Bessie out of it—"

"Sure, easy. That isn't even the real story, as far as the story I'm going to break is concerned. It's frosting, but we can leave it off the cake. And for your sake I'll send Ganslen a telegram and tell them to start making more SM-one's right away to cash in on the boom. And listen, Charlie, do you ever get to Chicago?"

"Haven't for a couple of years. Why?"

"Well look, when you get some of these royalties, drop down and we'll have an evening together. I'll show you the town. We'll hang one on. If you get in town in the daytime, phone me at the *Blade*, city room. If you get in after dark, phone—"

"City room? *Blade*? You a reporter?"

Sweeney said despairingly, "Oh, Lord." He shouldn't have—he should have put his hands over his stomach right away, quick. But he didn't.

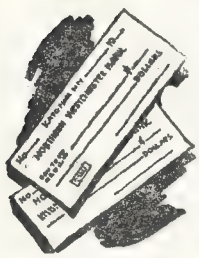
Charlie's fist went in it, up to Charlie's wrist, and Sweeney folded like a jack-knife, just in time for Charlie's other fist to meet his chin coming down. But, as before, he didn't even feel the punch on his chin.

He heard Charlie say, "You lousy, double-crossing so-and-so! I wish you'd get up and fight."

Nothing was farther from Sweeney's mind, or rather from what was left of Sweeney's mind. He couldn't even talk. If he'd opened his mouth something might have come out, but it wouldn't have been words.

He heard Charlie walk away.

CHAPTER XVI



THERE'S no need to describe how Sweeney felt. That was the third time he'd been hit in the stomach and it didn't feel any different, except in degree, from the first two times.

After a few minutes he managed to get to the curb and sit there doubled up until, after about ten more minutes, he heard and saw the bus coming and managed to get to his feet, if not quite erect, and boarded it.

He sat doubled up in the bus, he sat doubled up in the station and then on the train he lay doubled up in his lower berth. He didn't get to sleep, soundly, until early dawn, just as the train got into Chicago.

By the time he got to his room, though, the worst was over and he slept. It was well into the afternoon—thirteen minutes after two—when he awoke. But by then the worst was over and he could walk without being bent over.

And it was Sunday and the last day of his vacation and three o'clock by the time he was bathed and dressed.

He went outside and looked east and west along Erie Street with a jaundiced eye and finally made up his mind to go east and see if he could find any angle on the Dorothy Lee murder that the police had missed. He didn't think he would. He didn't.

Luck was with him in finding both the janitor and Mrs. Rae Haley, the woman who had phoned the police, in. But luck was against him in finding out from either of them anything significant that he didn't already know. He ran out of questions to ask after fifteen minutes with the janitor, who had not known Miss Lee personally at all.

It took him an hour and a half to listen to everything Mrs. Haley thought of to tell him and at the end of that hour and a half he knew a lot more than he had known about Dorothy Lee—nearly all of it favorable—but none of it in the slightest degree helpful, unless negatively.

Rae Haley, a buxom wench with hennaed hair and just a touch too much make-up for a Sunday afternoon at home, turned out to be an ad-taker for a rival newspaper but seemed nonetheless eager to talk to the *Blade*—or to Sweeney.

She had known Dorothy Lee fairly well and had liked her; Dorothy was "nice and quiet." Yes, she'd been in Dorothy's apartment often. Yes, Dorothy had had boy-friends. At one time or another she'd gone out with four or five of them, but none had been "serious."

Mrs. Haley had met each of them and knew their names; she'd given the names of all of them to the police. Apparently the police had found all of them to be all right, because if they had arrested one of them it would have been

in the papers, wouldn't it?

Sweeney thought, for no particular reason, that he would have liked Bessie Wilson. He rather wished that he had known her. And damn it, he liked Charlie Wilson in spite of what Charlie Wilson had done to him. A cocky little guy but quite likable when he wasn't punching one in the stomach.

He decided that he'd keep his promise to Charlie anyway and send that telegram to the general manager of Ganslen. He was planning how to word it when he remembered where he was and realized that Mrs. Haley was still talking and that he hadn't been listening at all.

HE walked downtown to the Loop and found a Western Union office open. He sat down with a pencil and a pad of blanks and tore up two tries before he evolved a telegram that came even close. Then he read that one over, saw several things missing in it and gave up.

He walked to a telephone exchange, where he asked to see and was given a Louisville telephone directory. Luckily Sweeney had a good memory for names and he recalled, from his previous call to Ganslen Art Company, the first name as well as the last name of the general manager. He found a home telephone listed.

He got a handful of change and went into a booth. A few minutes later he was talking to the general manager and buyer of Ganslen.

He said, "This is Sweeney of the Chicago *Blade*, Mr. Roberts. I talked to you a few days ago about one of your statuettes, the SM-one. You were kind enough to tell me who modeled it."

"Yes, I remember."

"To return the favor, I want to tip you off to something that will make some money for you and for Chapman Wilson. Only I'm going to ask you to keep this confidential until the *Blade* breaks the story tomorrow. You'll agree to that?"

"Uh—exactly what am I agreeing to, Mr. Sweeney?"

"Merely that you don't tell anyone at all what I'm going to tell you now until after tomorrow noon. You can go ahead meanwhile and act on the information. You can start getting ready to cash in."

"That sounds fair enough."

"Okay, here's the dope. You sold two SM-one's in Chicago. Well, I've got one of them and the Ripper's got the other one. You've heard of our Ripper murders, haven't you?"

"Of course. Good Lord! You mean—"

"Yeah. Tomorrow the *Blade* will print a picture of Screaming Mimi—about four columns wide on page one if I judge rightly—and break the story. Probably the Ripper will be caught. A friend or his landlady or someone will have seen it in his room and phone the police. He can hardly have had it for two months without *someone* having seen it.

"But whether he's caught through it or not it's a nationwide big story. You're likely to be swamped for weeks with orders for Mimi. I'd suggest you put her in production immediately—work a night shift tonight if you can get anybody down to your factory or workshop or whatever it is.

"And if I were you I wouldn't sell those hundred-odd copies you have. I'd get them to dealers quickly to use as samples to take orders. Get them to Chicago dealers in particular as fast as you can. Start one of your salesmen up this way tonight with a trunk full of them."

"Thank you, Mr. Sweeney. I can't say how much I appreciate your giving me this much notice on—"

"Wait," said Sweeney. "I'm not through yet. One thing I want you to do. Put a special mark somewhere on each one you sell from now on, so it can be told from the one the Ripper's got. Keep the mark secret so he can't duplicate it and let the police know what the mark is when they come to you—as they will after that story breaks.

"Otherwise, they'll be on my neck for tipping you off to flood the Chicago market with them, see? But they'll see that, in the long run, we're doing them a favor. If there are more Mimis coming the Ripper may keep his, whereas if he knows his is going to keep on being the only one in Chicago, he'll get rid of it quick.

"And he won't know about the secret mark all the others will have. Listen, make the secret mark a tiny chip out of the bottom of the base in the right front corner—so it'll look accidental if anyone looks at just *one* of them.

"Fine. That will be simple."

"I'll do it on mine. And you've got a

record, I hope, of just where the forty or so that you actually sold throughout the country went, haven't you?"

"Our books would show that."

"Good, then if an unmarked Mimi shows up, it can be traced back to prove it's not the one the Ripper bought. And one more thing—"

"Yes?"

"I'm not going to drag in the origin of Mimi. Charlie—Chapman Wilson's pretty sensitive about what happened to his sister and this is a big enough story without using that. After all, that's past history and our Ripper is very much current. He said you promised not to use that for publicity—so stick to your promise to him."

"Of course, Mr. Sweeney. And thanks again, tremendously."

AFTER he hung up, Sweeney dropped another nickel but Yolanda's phone wasn't answered so he got it back. It was too early for her to be at the night club. She was probably out eating somewhere.

Well, maybe he'd better skip trying to talk to her until after tomorrow when he'd broken the Screaming Mimi story in the *Blade*. And maybe by then the Ripper would be caught and she wouldn't have an escort of cops everywhere she moved.

Of course he could watch her dance tonight. Or could he?

He looked up the number of the Tit-Tat-Toe Club and called it. A bit of argument and the use of his name got him Harry Yahn. Harry's voice boomed cheerfully over the phone. "Hello, Sweeney. How're things?"

"Going fine, Harry. I'm going to break a big story on the Ripper tomorrow. Extra publicity for Yolanda."

"That's great. Does it—uh—concern anyone I know?"

"Not unless you know the Ripper. Do you?"

"Not by that name. Well, what about it? You don't want any more money, I hope."

"Good heavens, no," said Sweeney. "Look, Harry, that's a dead issue. What I want to know is, are we still friends?"

"Why, sure, Sweeney. Did you have any reason for thinking we weren't?"

"Yes," said Sweeney. "But did that wash it out? Specifically, am I going to be persona non gra—I mean, if I show up at El Madhouse or the Tit-Tat-Toe, do I get in and out again safely? Or do I wear a suit of armor?"

Harry Yahn laughed. "You're welcome any time, Sweeney. Seriously. As you said, it's a dead issue."

"Swell," said Sweeney. "I just wanted to be sure."

"Uh—did Willie use discretion?"

"For Willie, I imagine it was. I just wanted to be sure you hadn't passed the word on to Nick. I'll probably, otherwise, go around to El Madhouse tonight."

"Fine. Nick's due to phone me soon and I'll tell him to hold a chair for you and not to take your money. No kidding, Sweeney, I like you. No hard feelings?"

"Very tender feelings," Sweeney said. "And the worst of it is, they've been worked on twice since then. That's just why I wanted to be sure before I went to El Madhouse tonight. Since it's okay, thanks for everything."

"Don't mention it, Sweeney. Take care of yourself."

After he'd hung up, Sweeney took a deep breath and—although it hurt his stomach a little—he felt better.

He went back for another handful of change, an even bigger handful this time. A nickel of it got him the long distance operator again. He let the New York operator do the looking up this time for he felt pretty sure Ray Land would have a home telephone in his own name. Ray had been a Chicago homicide cop once. Now he was running a small agency of his own in New York.

Ray was home.

Sweeney said, "This is Sweeney. Remember me?"

"Sure. So?"

"Want you to investigate an alibi for me. In New York." He gave the details, Greene's name and hotel and the exact date. "I know he was registered at the hotel on that day and the day before and the day after. The police checked that. What I want to find out—for sure, not a probability—is whether he was really there that night, the twenty-seventh."

"Can try. It's almost two weeks ago. How far do you want me to go?"

"As far as you can. Talk to everybody at the hotel who might have seen him come in or go out, the maid who'd have made up his room in the morning, everything like that. Listen, the crucial

time is three o'clock in the morning. If you can definitely locate him six hours or less either side of that, I'll settle."

"Twelve hours isn't so bad. Maybe I can do it. How much you want me to spend?"

"Spend all you want provided you do it right away. Within reason, that is. I'll wire you a hundred cash for a retainer. If you go a little over it, even double it, okay."

"That ought to cover it, Sweeney. It'll cover two days' time and since it's right on Manhattan there won't be any expenses to speak of. If I can't get anything in two days, I probably can't at all. Why the six hour leeway?"

"I want to convince myself that he wasn't in Chicago at three a.m. Counting time to and from airports on either end, getting a place and everything, that's the least he could have done it in. Maybe five hours would be safer.

"If you can prove he was at the hotel as late as ten in the evening or as early as eight the next morning, I'll be convinced. And, just in case it could have been a ringer, someone else there using his name, here's a description." Sweeney gave it.

He added, "If you can't alibi him, you might try that description at the airport. Or if it comes down to that I'll try to get you a photo. Check with me after you've got everything you can get at the hotel. Good enough?"

"Good enough. I'll get around there this evening. It'll be the night shift I'll mostly want to talk to."

Outside the telephone exchange, Sweeney found that it was getting dark and that he was getting hungry. He remembered he hadn't seen a Sunday paper and might have missed something; he found copies of two of them still left on a newsstand and very early editions, still sticky with ink, of two Monday morning papers. He bought all four and took them into a restaurant with him.

READING while he ate, he found out that nothing new had happened or transpired. All the papers were keeping the story alive—it was too big a story to let an issue pass without *something*—but the somethings added up or canceled out to nothing.

He stretched the eating and the reading until it was almost ten o'clock and then left. He remembered the retainer and stopped in at the Western Union office again to send it to Ray Land.

That still left him over seven hundred dollars and he wished there was some way he could spend some of it on Yolanda. Well, there'd be time for that after the cops quit watching her. Meanwhile, there *was* one sighting shot he could take and should have thought sooner of taking. He should have sent more flowers when she got home from the hospital. But better late than not at all.

He found a flower shop in a hotel still open and ordered two dozen red roses sent to her at El Madhouse as soon as they could get a messenger to take them there. He tried writing on and tore up three cards. On the fourth he wrote "Sweeney" and let it go at that.

He caught a taxi and directed it to El Madhouse. It would get him there just in time for Yo's first performance of the evening. It did, and Nick was still saving a place for him.

After the floor show he wandered out to the bar and managed to get a place at it. But it was ten minutes before he could get a drink.

He sipped it and brooded.

Unless breaking the story that the Ripper had bought and now presumably still owned a copy of Ganslen's SM-one brought results, it looked as though he was stymied. That was the only real lead found—the fact that the killer of Lola Brent, two months ago, had undoubtedly been the same person who had purchased from her the statuette whose purchase price she had dragged down. Sweeney didn't doubt that for a second. It fitted too perfectly to be a coincidence. It *had* to be.

But for the rest he had nothing. The trip to Brampton had been completely a blind alley—an alley populated with little men who kept pounding on his sore stomach, before and after getting drunk with him.

And almost worse than those punches had been the anticlimax of learning—after he'd heard first of a Ripper, a blonde, and a crazy artist—that the Ripper and the blonde were dead long since and the crazy artist was well alibied. And even if Charlie Wilson hadn't been alibied, Sweeney couldn't picture him as the Ripper. He sighed and took another sip of his drink.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder.

CHAPTER XVII

SWEENEY turned and found himself staring full into the thick glasses that magnified Greene's eyes and made them so frightening.

Sweeney grinned and said, "Hi, Doc. What'll you have?"

"I've got a drink over at a table. Nick's holding my chair and another. Come on over."

Sweeney picked up his drink and followed Greene to a corner table. Nick, standing beside it, said, "Hi, Mr. Sweeney," and then hurried off about his business. Sweeney and Greene sat down.

"Getting anywhere?" Greene asked.

"Maybe. I don't know. I'm breaking a big story tomorrow—the biggest one to date."

"Outside of the actual murders."

"Maybe bigger," Sweeney said.

"It would be useless for me to ask what it is, I suppose."

"You've got something there, Doc. But cheer up—it'll be on the streets in twelve hours."

"I'll watch for it. I'm still worried about something happening to Yo. So I hope you have really got something." He took off his glasses and polished them. Sweeney, studying him, saw that he looked quite different without them. He looked tired, genuinely worried. Sweeney almost wished he had back the hundred dollars he'd just wired to New York. Almost, not quite.

Doc Greene put the glasses back on and looked at Sweeney through them, and his eyes were monstrous again. Sweeney thought the hundred dollars was well spent.

Greene said, "Meanwhile, Sweeney, take good care of yourself."

"I will. Any special reason?"

Greene chuckled. "Yes, for *my* sake. Since I lost my temper the other night and shot off my mouth, Captain Bline has had me on the carpet. Everything but a rubber hose. It seems he took my little threat seriously."

"And was he right?"

"Well—yes and no. You did, that one time, get under my skin and I think I meant it when I said it. Of course, after cool deliberation I realized I'd been silly. By saying that I did the one thing that made you completely safe—from me. If you ever want to kill a man, Sweeney, don't make the announcement before the police and hope to get away with it."

"Then why the warning to take good care of myself?"

"As I said, for *my* sake. Bline told me—*promised* me—that if anything happens to you after my silly threat, he'd arrest me and rubber-hose me to hell and back. Even if I had an alibi he'd figure that I hired the job done. I'm going to be a dead duck, Sweeney, if anything happens to you."

Sweeney smiled. "Doc, you almost tempt me to commit suicide without leaving a note."

"Don't, please. Not that I think you would but you worry me, talking about breaking a big story tomorrow. You might say that to someone who wouldn't want a big story to break for fear of what it might be. You see what I mean."

"I see what you mean. But you're the first person in Chicago I've told. The only other one is hundreds of miles from here. Of course, you could pass it on."

"Perish the thought, Sweeney. Your safety has become a matter of importance to me. I've told you why." He shook his head slowly. "I am amazed at myself for having said such a foolish thing—in such company. I, a trained psychiatrist!

"Have you had any psychiatric training, Sweeney? From the skillful way you maneuvered me into loss of control—well, there's no harm done if nothing happens to you. But until this mess is over I'll chip in half the cost if you want to hire a bodyguard. Willie, maybe? Have you met Willie Harris?"

"Willie is wonderful," Sweeney said. "But I doubt if Harry Yahn would care to part with him. No thanks, Doc, whether you're serious or not I'll take my chances without a bodyguard. Or if I should hire one I won't tell you about it."

Green sighed. "You still don't trust me, Sweeney. Well, I've got to run along. To see a client at another club. Take care of yourself."

Sweeney went back to the bar and had his drink replenished. He drank it very slowly and thought about how he was going to write the story for tomor-

row's *Blade* and thus managed to kill time until the second floor show went on.

He saw it. It was different in one very minor but very important detail. Yolanda Lang wore a red rose pinned to the waist of her black dress. Sweeney's roses had arrived then, after the first show but before the second.

And she'd worn one. That was all he wanted to know. He thought but wasn't sure that her eyes met his in the instant after the dog had reared up behind her. But that wasn't important. She *had* worn one of the roses he'd sent.

AFTER the show—wondering whether he was being as astute a psychiatrist as Doc Greene had credited him with being—he didn't try to see her or speak to her. There'd be cops—and Doc—around if he did Maybe, just possibly, by tomorrow night the cops wouldn't have to be guarding Yolanda. And Doc—well, he'd worry about Greene when the time came.

He didn't wait for the third show. Tomorrow might turn out to be a big day and it was after midnight already. He went home and to bed, read a while and got to sleep by two o'clock. His alarm woke him at half-past seven o'clock and it was Monday.

It was Monday and it was a bright cheerful day. The sun was bright but not unduly hot for August the eleventh. No clouds in the sky but a cooling breeze off the lake. Not bad at all.

He had a good breakfast and got to the *Blade* promptly at nine.

He hung up his coat and hat and then, before the city editor could catch him, he headed right for Wally Krieg's office. The package containing SM-one was under his arm.

Wally looked up as he came in. He said, "Hi, Sweeney. Reported to Crawley yet?"

"Nope. Want to show you something first." He started to unwrap the package.

"All right, but after that report to Crawley. Somebody took a jewelry salesman for his samples last night and we want to get on it quick. Over at—"

"Hush," said Sweeney. He got the package unwrapped and set Mimi on the desk, facing the managing editor. "Mimi, meet Wally Krieg. Wally, meet Mimi. Screaming Mimi."

"Charmed. Now take that thing out of here and—"

"Hush," said Sweeney. "She's got a sister. *One* sister, in all of Chicago.

"Sweeney, what are you getting at?"

"The Ripper," said Sweeney. "He's got Mimi's sister. We got Mimi—and don't think she doesn't go on the expense account for the full purchase price. That is, if you want to send her up to the photo department and run a pic of her on page one today."

"You say the Ripper's got one like her? Are you sure?"

"Reasonably sure. There were two in Chicago. The Ripper bought the other one from Lola Brent just before he followed her home and killed her. It's probably what set him off. Look at it!"

"And his is the only other one in Chicago?"

"Yes," said Sweeney. "Well, if you're not interested I'll go stick it in my desk drawer and then look up Crawley." He picked up Mimi and started out the door. Wally said, "Hey!" and he waited.

"Wally," he said, "I'm getting fed up on this Ripper business. Maybe you'd better keep me off it. Of course I could get the whole thing for the first edition today, but you can have Mimi anyway, if you want her, and one of the other boys can check her pedigree —with Raoul Reynarde— and trace her back like I did and give you the story for tomorrow or part of it for a late edition today. But I'd just as soon not—"

"Sweeney, quit blithering. Shut the door."

"Sure, Wally. From which side?"

Wally just glared at him and Sweeney decided that enough was enough and shut it from the inside. Wally was getting the city desk on the phone. He barked that someone else should go on the jewelry case and that Sweeney was on special assignment. He jiggled the receiver and got the photo department and apparently was satisfied with whoever answered the phone for he told him to come down right away.

Then he swung on Sweeney. He said, "Put that thing down carefully before you drop it and break it."

Sweeney put Mimi back down on the desk. Wally stared at her.

Then up at Sweeney. He said, "What the hell you waiting for? A kiss? Go write the story. Wait a minute—don't.

Lots of time before first edition. Sit down and tell me about it first. Maybe there are angles somebody else can be doing while you're batting it out."

Sweeney sat down and told most of it. As much, at least, as he intended to put into the story itself. There was an interruption while a photographer came in and Wally gave him Mimi with instructions—and with threats of almost unbelievable things that would happen to him if Mimi were dropped and broken before the photograph had been taken. The photographer left, walking carefully and holding Mimi as though she were made of eggshell. Sweeney resumed and finished.

WALLY said, "Good. Go ahead and write it. Only you didn't do the story any good by phoning Ganslen and telling them to cash in while it's hot. The police aren't going to like that. They'll want there to be only *one* Mimi in Chicago for as long a time as possible. And I mean *one*. I'm going to order this one broken to pieces as soon as I see a good photo of it. Put that in the story. It narrows things down. Plenty. What the hell did you want to phone that art company for, to tip them off?"

Sweeney felt unccomfortable. It *had* been a boner and he didn't want to explain about Charlie Wilson and his real reason for the call. He said, weakly, "Thought I ought to pay 'em back for the favor they did me on the first call, Wally. Telling me only two had been sold in Chicago. Without that—"

Wally said, "Well, I'll phone them and head them off while you write the story. Look, mention that the statuette was made by Ganslen Art Company, Louisville, and they won't *have* to send any salesman or samples to Chicago or anywhere in this area. They'll be swamped with orders by telephone, just from that information and the photo in the paper. Every dealer in the area will be calling them.

"I'll phone and tell them that. Who'd you talk to?"

"General manager. Roberts."

"Okay, I'll talk to Roberts and tell him to go ahead and take all the orders he wants from this area but to stall as long as he can on shipping and not to send any samples right away. And I'll make sure he's taking your suggestion on putting a special mark on each of them. Don't mention *that*, though, in the story. And bring it here when you've finished. I want to pass on it personally."

Sweeney nodded and stood up. Wally said, "One other thing I'm going to do and that's phone Bline. If we break this story without tipping him off first we'll be number one on the department's s. o. b. list. I'm going to give him the story first and tell him we're breaking it today but we're giving him advance notice."

"What if he crosses you by giving it to the other papers?"

"I don't think he will. If he does they still won't have Mimi or a pic of her. The story itself isn't worth much without the pic and I'm going to splash that smack in the middle of the front page. Four columns by about fifteen inches."

"Shall I mention that we're running the pic in full color—black?"

"Get the hell out of here."

Sweeney got the hell out and sat down at his desk. He realized, as he pulled paper into the ancient Underwood, that both of Wally's ideas had been good. It wouldn't hurt the story to give the cops a couple of hours' notice, and it wouldn't hurt Ganslen's sales (or Charlie's royalties) if they didn't fill orders from Chicago for a week or so. The story would stay good—and would turn better if it actually led to the capture of the Ripper.

He had an hour to go and started typing. His phone rang and it was Wally. Wally asked, "Going to have plenty of time? Or would you rather dictate it to a fast rewrite man?"

"I can do it."

"Okay. Send it to me as it comes out of the mill, a page at a time. I'll have a boy waiting at your desk. Slug it MIMI."

Sweeney slugged it MIMI and kept typing. A minute later a copy boy was breathing down his neck but Sweeney was used to that and it didn't bother him. He sent the last page in ten minutes before the first edition deadline.

After that he lighted a cigarette and pretended to be busy so Crawley wouldn't think of anything else for him to do right away until deadline was past and he figured Wally would be free again and then he wandered into Wally's office again.

"How's Mimi?" he asked.

"A broken woman. Look in my waste basket if you don't believe me."

"I'd rather not," Sweeney said.

A boy came in with papers fresh off the press and put three of them on Wally's desk. Sweeney picked one up and glanced at the page one layout. There was Mimi, all right, slightly larger than actual size. She had the banner head, two columns of story, four columns of picture. And Wally had by-lined the story for him.

Sweeney said, "Nice layout," and Wally grunted, reading.

Sweeney said, "Nice story, too. Thanks for telling me so." Wally grunted again.

Sweeney said, "How about the rest of the day off?"

THIS time Wally didn't grunt. He put down the paper and got ready to explode. "Are you *crazy?* You've been off two weeks, come back to work for two hours and—"

"Relax, Wally. Don't break a blood vessel. Where do you think that story came from? Out of the air? I've been working twenty hours a day on it, more or less, for three days. On my own time.

"I came in with that story ready to write up. And brought Mimi with me for company. And why? Because I worked till four o'clock this morning and got two hours sleep, that's why. Dragged myself out of bed half-awake to come in and write the biggest story of the year for you and then you—"

"Shut up. All right, get the hell out of here. Of all the damn' goldbricks—"

"Thank you. Seriously, Wally, I *am* going home. I'll be in my room the rest of the day and you can reach me by phone. I'm going to rest but I won't get undressed—and if anything breaks on this story call me quick. I'll be on it just as fast as I would if I were waiting around here. Okay?"

"Okay, Sweeney. If anything breaks you're on it. And listen, Sweeney—win, lose or draw, it's a swell story."

"Thanks," Sweeney said. "And thanks to hell and back for carrying me while I was—gone."

"This makes up for it. You know, Sweeney, there are damn' few real reporters left. And you're—"

"Hold it," said Sweeney. "Pretty soon we'll be crying into our beer and we haven't got any beer to cry into. I'm going to beat it."

He beat it.

He took one of Wally's papers with him so he wouldn't have to hunt one up elsewhere or wait for one on the street and went home. He took a cab, partly because he still had more money than he knew what to do with and partly because—temporarily—he really did feel tired. It was partly the letdown but mostly the fact that, for a while now, there was nothing intelligent to do but to wait.

Either the story of Mimi would lead to a big break in the story of the Ripper or it wouldn't. If it did it would probably happen this afternoon or this evening—or possibly tonight.

If it didn't—well, then it didn't. He'd be back at work at nine o'clock tomorrow morning and he didn't think, now, that Wally would keep him off the Ripper case. He'd just have to forget Mimi and try to dig up another angle somewhere. Probably by going over again and again more thoroughly a lot of the ground he had already covered.

At home he made himself comfortable and read the story through, leisurely and carefully. Wally had added to it, splicing in some recapitulation on the stories of the other three women who had been attacked, but he had changed hardly a word of what Sweeney had written.

This time he even read the continuation on an inside page. Then he folded the paper together and put it with the others that covered the various Ripper murders.

He sat down and tried to relax but couldn't. He went over to the phonograph—it seemed naked now without the statuette atop it—and played the Brahms Fourth. That helped a little, although he couldn't really concentrate on it.

By two o'clock he was hungry but he didn't want to risk missing a phone call, so he went downstairs to Mrs. Randall's rooms and got her to fry some bacon for a sandwich.

By that time he'd decided he didn't give a damn if the phone rang or not. Then it rang and he almost choked swallowing the big bite of sandwich he'd just taken and almost fell getting up the stairs to answer the phone in the second floor hallway. The call was for

another roomer, who wasn't in.

He went back downstairs and finished the sandwich.

He went back upstairs to his room, put the records of a De Falla album on the phonograph and, while they played, tried to reread the short stories in a Damon Runyan collection. He didn't do too well with either the reading or the listening.

The phone rang. He got there in nothing flat, slamming the door of his own room to shut off part of the sound of the phonograph—which was about one second quicker than stopping to shut off the phonograph itself would have been.

It was Wally. He said, "Okay, Sweeney. Get over to State Street. You know the address."

"What's up?"

"They got the Ripper. Now, listen, we got a headline and a bulletin going in the Final—it's going to press now—and we're not holding it for details. We got the main facts and the full story will have to go in tomorrow. It's an even break. We'll beat the morning papers on the bulletin and the main facts, but they'll beat us on getting a detailed story.

"So there's no rush. Get over there and get the full dope but you can write it up when you get in tomorrow."

"Wally, what happened? Did he make another try at Yolanda Lang? Is she all right?"

"I guess so. Yeah, he made another try and this time the dog got him, like it almost did last time except that last time he slammed the door on the dog—"

"I *know* what happened last time. What happened *this* time?"

"I told you, dammit. They *got* him. He's still alive but probably won't be long. Took him to a hospital but don't waste time. They won't let you talk to him. He went out a window. At the dame's place, I mean. Good work, Sweeney. That Mimi story of yours broke it. He not only had the statuette but had it *with* him."

"Who? I mean, have they got his name?"

"Name? Sure, we got his name. It's Greene, James J. Greene. Captain Bline says he's suspected him all along. Now quit pumping *me*—get over there and get the story."

The receiver banged in Sweeney's ear but he stared into the black mouthpiece of the wall phone for seconds before he put his own receiver back on the hook.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT wasn't quite believable somehow. He'd thought it all along and yet the reality was hard to swallow. For one thing, one simple thing, he couldn't think of Doc Greene as being dead. But Horlick—who was already there when Sweeney got there—was saying that he was.

"Yeah," he said. "Bline got a call from the hospital. He sent two of the boys with Greene to try to get a detailed confession and get it signed. But I guess they didn't make it and he couldn't have signed it anyway, what with both arms broken among other things. And he wasn't very coherent, what I heard of him. I got here before they took him away."

"How come so quick, Wayne?"

"Bull luck. I was already on my way here. For part of the follow-up tomorrow on that Mimi story you broke today, Wally sent me to interview Yolanda Lang, to ask her if she'd ever seen such a statuette.

"If not, and it probably would have been not, I was to get a story anyway by asking her what her reaction was to a picture of it—whether it looked like she felt when the Ripper was coming at her in the hallway. That kind of crap. And I got here about the time the police ambulance did."

"And Yolanda isn't up there?"

"Nope, she ran out with the dog just after it happened. Shock again or fright. She's probably having the meemies somewhere but she'll show up. I'm going in with what I got. You go on upstairs and see if you can get more if you want to. Bline's up there."

He went his way south on State Street and Sweeney pushed through the knot of people who were standing around the doorway of the apartment building on State just south of Chicago Avenue, the same doorway through which Sweeney had stared only a few nights ago and had seen a woman and a dog.

This time the crowd was bigger although there was nothing to be seen through the glass. Sweeney pushed through to a policeman guarding the door. His press card got him inside and he ran up the stairs to the third floor.

Yolanda Lang's apartment was the rear north one of four on the third floor. There wasn't any need of checking the number on the door because the door was open and the place was full of cops. At least it looked full of cops. When Sweeney got in, he saw there were only two besides Bline.

Bline came over to him. "Sweeney, if I wasn't so happy I'd break your neck. How long did you have that statuette?"

"Don't remember exactly, Cap."

"That's what I mean. But—well, we got the Ripper and without another ripping, although that must've been a pretty close thing. I'll settle for that. I'm even ready to buy you a drink. Guess I'm through here. I'll leave one of the boys to wait for the Lang dame to be sure she's all right when she comes back."

"Is there any doubt that she isn't?"

"Physically, sure. He didn't touch her with the knife at all this time. The pooch got in ahead. But she's probably in a mental tizzy, worse than last time. Not that I blame her."

"Did Devil kill Greene?"

"Well, he chewed him up a bit but didn't kill him. Doc must've managed to keep an arm over his throat. But he went out that window and that killed him all right. Must've backed up against it and a lunge of the dog knocked him out backwards."

Bline had gestured to a wide-open window and Sweeney went over to it and looked out. Two stories below was a small cement courtyard. It was pretty well littered with junk people had thrown out of windows.

Sweeney asked, "Where's the statuette?"

"Down there in the courtyard, most of it. We found enough pieces of it to identify it. Doc must still have had hold of it when he went out the window. Probably trying to club off the dog with it.

"The knife was there too. He must've had the statuette in one hand and the knife in the other—it's a wonder the dog managed not to get hurt. But I guess Doc had to keep one arm to cover his throat and wasn't fast enough with the other. A dog like that is hell on wheels in a fight."

Sweeney looked down into the courtyard and shivered a little.

He said, "I'll take that drink, Cap. And I'll buy back. Let's get out of here."

They went to the corner of State and Chicago, the tavern from which the phone call had been made the night of the first attack on Yolanda. Bline bought.

Sweeney said, "I know everything except what happened. Can you put it in order for me?"

"The whole thing? Or just this afternoon?"

"Just this afternoon."

BLINE said, "Yolanda was alone in her apartment—as of a few minutes after three o'clock. We know that because I had a guy stationed to watch the place, from across the hall. We'd sublet the flat across from hers for that purpose and there was a man stationed there at all times, except of course when she was working at the club. He had a peephole rigged so he could watch the door to her place.

"He saw Doc Greene come up with a shoebox under his arm and knock on her door, see? Well, that was all right. Doc had called there before and I'd said it was okay to let him in. If it had been a stranger, Garry—that's the guy who was on duty—would have had his door open and a gun ready."

Sweeney asked, "Did Doc call on business? I mean, when he'd been there before?"

Bline shrugged. "Don't know and didn't care. We're not the vice squad. We were just hunting the Ripper. And I'd thought, from Greene's alibis, that he was in the clear. Well, I was wrong. Did you really suspect him, Sweeney, or did you keep needling him just because you didn't like him?"

"I don't really know, Cap. But what happened?"

"Well, Yolanda answered the door and let him in. He was in there about five minutes when things started to happen. Garry heard Yolanda scream and the dog growl and Greene yell, almost all at once. He yanked his own door open and started across the hall-

way. He yanked at Yolanda's door but it was locked—a snap lock—and he was just about to put a bullet through the lock when the door opened.

"He says Yolanda had opened it and she pushed past him into the hallway, her face as white as a sheet and looking like something pretty horrible had happened. But there wasn't any blood on her—she wasn't hurt.

"Garry tried to grab her with his free hand—he had his gun in the other—but the dog jumped at him and he had to let go to cover his throat. The dog took a piece out of his sleeve but didn't get hold of his arm.

"By that time Yolanda was past him and starting down the stairs and the dog wheeled and followed her. So he didn't have to shoot the dog. And as long as Yolanda seemed all right he ran into Yolanda's apartment to see what went on there.

"There didn't seem to be anyone in there and he wondered what had happened to Greene. Then he heard a groan from the courtyard and looked out the open window—it's a pretty big one, the kind that swings out instead of raising—and there was Doc Greene lying in the courtyard.

"So he phones for me and the ambulance and we get here. Greene was still alive but dying and not very coherent. He could just say a few words but they were enough."

Sweeney asked:

"What do you figure sent Greene around there?"

"How do you figure how a homicidal maniac reasons, Sweeney? How do I know? I think it was your story about that statuette that set him off. He had it and maybe Yolanda knew that he had it and the jig would be up as soon as she happened to see your front page. Why he took it along in a shoebox when he went to kill her I don't know.

"But he had it out of the box in one hand and the knife in the other hand—when the dog saved her by getting him. Chewed him up pretty bad. Maybe he even jumped out of the window to get away from the dog but I think it's more likely he got backed up against it and went out accidentally when the dog jumped for him again."

"What do you figure happened to Yolanda?"

"Shock again, of course. She's probably wandering around in a daze, but she's well protected. She'll snap out of it by herself, probably, and come back. If not, she can't be hard to find—a dame like that with a dog like that. Well, I got to get in and report. So long, Sweeney."

Bline left and Sweeney ordered another drink. And another and then one more. It was getting dark when he left the tavern and went back to Yolanda's flat. There was still a policeman at the door.

Sweeney asked him if Yolanda had come back and she hadn't.

He strolled over to Clark Street, stopped in at Ireland's and ordered a lobster. While it was cooking he went to the phone booth and called Ray Land, the private detective he'd hired in New York.

He said:

"This is Sweeney, Ray. Guess you can call it off."

"That's what I figured, Sweeney. Heard on the radio while I was eating dinner that your Chicago Ripper was caught and his name was familiar. So I figured you wouldn't want me to keep on. Well, I put in a day on it, so you got fifty bucks coming back. I'll send you a check."

"Get anywhere on it?"

"Hadn't yet. It was tough going, what with it being two weeks ago. Best bet I had was a maid who managed to remember that one morning his bed hadn't been slept in but she couldn't remember which morning it was. I was going to see her again and try to pin it down after she'd had time to think it over. Shall I send you that check care of the *Blade*?"

"Sure. And thanks, Ray."

SWEENEY called Captain Bline at headquarters and asked, "Any reports on Yolanda yet?"

"Yeah, Sweeney. A f u n n y one." Bline's voice sounded puzzled. "She turned up at El Madhouse some time ago. Just half an hour after Greene had tried to attack her. She got some money from Nick and left again. And no report on her since."

"The hell," said Sweeney. "How did she act?"

"A little funny, Nick said, but not too bad. He said she was pale and a little jittery but he didn't think anything of

it. He hadn't heard about what happened to Doc yet and she didn't say anything about it.

"Just wanted some money—gave him a song-and-dance about being able to buy something she wanted for a bargain if she did it right away for cash. Nick said he figured somebody had offered her a stolen mink coat or something for a few hundred bucks and she wanted it but was a little afraid of the deal and that was why she was nervous."

"How much did he give her?" Sweeney asked.

"A week's salary. She had it coming as of tomorrow night anyway so he figured he might as well give it to her a day sooner."

"That's funny."

"Yeah, but I think I can figure it. I'd guess it that she just wanted to hide out for a day or two. It was shock, but temporary, that sent her chasing out of the building after Greene tried to attack her a second time.

"She must've got over the worst of it quick if she could talk normally to Nick within a half hour. Only I'd guess she just didn't feel up to facing us and all the reporters and everything. But she'll show up in a few days when she gets her balance back. She won't miss cashing in on her contract and all the publicity and everything."

"Could be. You hunting for her?"

Bline said, "No. Why should we? We could find her easily enough, just checking hotels. But from what Nick says she's all right, so it isn't our business. If I thought she was wandering around in a daze from shock or something—"

"She didn't go back home to get any clothes or anything?"

"No. Our man's still there and he's to phone me if she shows back there. Guess that's partly what she wanted money for, so she wouldn't have to go back there and face the music."

"Okay, Cap," Sweeney said. "Thanks a lot."

He got back to his table just as the lobster arrived.

He ate it thoughtfully. He didn't know exactly what he was being thoughtful about until the lobster had been reduced to a shell.

And then, suddenly, he knew what he had been thinking and it scared hell out of him.

CHAPTER XIX

HE didn't hurry. His coffee came and he drank it slowly, still horrifying himself by what he was thinking. And then it got worse, for he found he wasn't thinking it any more—he *knew* it. A lot of it was guesswork but each guess dropped into place like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle that will fit nowhere else and at no other angle.

He paid the check and walked south to El Madhouse. Nick saw him the moment he went in and came to meet him. He said, "Hi, Sweeney. I'm worried. Know anything about where Yo is or if she's coming tonight?"

Sweeney said, "I'm worried too. Listen, Nick, did you happen to notice when Yolanda left here whether she took a taxi?"

"No. She walked north."

"How was she dressed?"

"In green, what they call a daytime dress. No coat or hat. And the dog was along, but not on a leash. Sometimes she has him on a leash, sometimes not. Say, it's rough about Doc, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"And he threatened to kill you. You're lucky, Sweeney."

"Yeah," said Sweeney.

He went outside and wondered how lucky he was going to be. It had been about five hours ago that Yolanda had left here. It was a break that she'd walked north, away from the Loop. In the Loop it would have been impossible to trace her.

He was lucky. A block north, and thirty questions later, he found a newsboy who'd been at his stand all afternoon, and he'd seen Yolanda Lang. Sure he knew her—by sight, he explained. She'd passed him and turned west on Ohio Street.

Sweeney turned west on Ohio Street.

It wasn't too difficult. A gorgeous blonde in bright green with a dog that looked like a fugitive from a James Oliver Curwood story. Within two blocks he found two people who had seen them.

In the third block, without turning off Ohio Street, he hit the jackpot. A tobacconist had not only seen the girl

and dog, he had seen them enter a building across the street— "The one right there, with the sign *Furnished Rooms.*"

Just inside the door was a bell and a sign that said "Ring for Landlady." Sweeney rang for landlady.

She was big and slovenly; she had a mean eye. Sweet reasonableness wasn't going to work and she didn't look as though she'd scare. Sweeney pulled out his wallet.

He took a twenty-dollar bill out of it, so she could see the figure in the corner. He said, "I'd like to talk to the girl who took a room late this afternoon. The one with the dog."

She didn't even hesitate in reaching for the bill. It disappeared in the neckline of her dress, into a bosom so redundant that Sweeney wondered if she'd be able to find the bill without searching.

She said, "She took a room on the second floor—the door right opposite the head of the stairs."

Sweeney said, "Thanks." He took another bill, of the same denomination, from his wallet. She reached for that one too but he didn't give it to her. He said, "I'm rather curious to know the circumstances—what she told you and what she's done since she came here."

"What do you want with her? Who are you?"

Sweeney said, "Okay, it doesn't matter. I'll just go up and talk to her." He started to put the second twenty back into his wallet.

She said, very quickly, "She came here late this afternoon and wanted a room. I said we didn't take dogs and she said she'd pay extra if I did and that the dog was well behaved, so I gave her the room. She didn't have any baggage. Not even a coat or hat."

"How long did she say she'd be staying?"

"She didn't know. But she said she'd pay for a full week no matter how short a time she stayed."

"How much *did* she pay you?"

She hesitated. "Twenty dollars."

Sweeney looked at her. He thought. "And you sell her out for another twenty." Aloud, he asked, "And since then?"

"She went out and left the dog in her room. She came back with a lot of packages. Then she took the dog down for a walk on a leash. She hadn't had one on him before. And she was disguised; she had on a black wig and shell-rimmed glasses and a different dress. You'd have hardly knowed her."

"Was it a wig or a dye job?"

"A dye job couldn't have dried that quick."

"Anything else you can tell me about her?"

She thought a moment but shook her head. Sweeney held out the second bill, holding it carefully so his hand wouldn't be touched by hers. He watched its course into her capacious bosom and thought that for forty dollars he wouldn't reach down there to take his two twenties back.

Something in his expression made her take a step backwards.

AND that was fine. Sweeney didn't want to have to brush against her as he went by and up the stairs. Halfway up he heard her door slam. For forty dollars she didn't care what he wanted with her new guest. Sweeney wished he hadn't given her any money. He could have got most of that information out of her anyway. He felt ashamed of himself for having taken the easy way.

And then he stood in front of the door on the second floor at the head of the stairs and he quit thinking about the landlady who'd directed him there.

He tapped gently at the door.

There was a rustle of movement within, and it opened a few inches. Wide eyes stared at him through shell-rimmed glasses, under black hair. But the eyes themselves he'd seen before, and often. They'd stared at him blankly through the glass of a door on State Street on a night that seemed many years ago. They'd looked at him across a table at El Madhouse. They'd looked at him from the El Madhouse stage.

And they'd looked at him from the face of a small black statuette that screamed as silently as its model had screamed noisily.

Sweeney said, "Hello, Bessie Wilson."

Her eyes widened and she gasped. But she stepped back and Sweeney walked in.

It was a small room and dingy. It contained a bed, a dresser and a chair but Sweeney didn't notice them. To Sweeney the room seemed full of dog. Even though the landlady had talked

about the dog, even though he himself had been thinking about it and had traced Yolanda through it, he had somehow managed to overlook the fact that Devil would be here.

But Devil was. He crouched, ready to spring at Sweeney's throat. The sound that came from deep in Devil's chest was that ominous buzzsaw sound that Sweeney had heard once before.

Yolanda said, "Quiet, Devil. Guard him." She had closed the door.

Sweeney felt something wet on his forehead. He felt something cold crawling down his back. It came to him now that he had been so interested in solving a problem that he had completely forgotten the personal danger its solution would place him in.

He stared at Yolanda Lang—at Bessie Wilson.

Even with the black wig, with the glasses, she was incredibly beautiful. Her only visible garment was a housecoat. Under it, her feet were bare. The housecoat had a long zipper down the front.

Sweeney wondered if—and then realized he didn't have time to wonder. He'd better say something, anything.

He said, "I finally figured it out, Bessie, except for a few details. The doctor or psychiatrist from the sanitarium near Beloit, the one who took an interest in your case after—after what happened to you at Brampton. That must have been Doc Greene—wasn't it?"

He'd have felt better if she'd answered—even to say uselessly that she didn't know what he was talking about—but she didn't speak.

She took off the glasses and the wig and put them on the dresser beside the door. She shook her head and her blond hair fell again into the page-boy bob. She regarded him gravely—but silently.

SWEENEY'S throat felt dry. He had to clear it before he could talk. He said, "It *must* have been Greene, whether he was using that name then or not. And he fell madly in love with you. Literally madly—so insanely that he ran out on his career to be with you. Or did he get into some trouble that made him have to leave his profession anyway?

"Did you know that he sent your brother a letter telling him that you had died? He did. Charlie thinks you're dead. But Greene must have signed papers to get you out of the san and then quit his job there to bring you to Chicago.

"He must have thought he'd cured you as nearly as you could be cured. He must have known that you'd never be fully sane but figured that, as a psychiatrist, he could handle you and control you. And he could and did, I guess—until something that he didn't know about set you off.

"He was a pretty brilliant guy, Yolanda. I'll bet he did the choreography for that dance you and the dog do. And it's good, damned good. I wondered for a while why he didn't get you better bookings—but it must have been because he didn't dare risk letting you become really famous under the circumstances.

"He kept you in the small time deliberately—as deliberately as he covered his real relationship to you, as doctor and patient, by becoming a bona fide agent and getting other clients."

Sweeney cleared his throat again, hoping she'd say something.

She didn't. She just looked at him. And the dog looked at him yellowly, ready to spring at the slightest word or signal from its mistress—or at the slightest move from Sweeney.

He said, "And you were all right until that day, two months ago, when you happened to go into Raoul's gift shop and bought that statuette from Lola Brent. Did you recognize that statuette, Yolanda?"

He thought she might answer that. She didn't.

He took a deep breath and the dog began to growl because his shoulders had moved. Sweeney stood very still and the dog quit growling.

He said, "Your brother Charlie made that statuette, Bessie. You were the model for it. It expressed, pretty perfectly, what you felt when—when the thing that drove you insane happened. Whether you recognized yourself in the statuette and knew that it was Charlie's work, I don't know. But seeing that statuette undid everything Doc Greene had done for you.

"Only there was a *transference*. Seeing yourself—in that statuette—as a *victim*, seeing yourself in that state from the outside, you became in your

mind the attacker. The killer with the knife. The woman from whom you bought the statuette was a beautiful blonde and your mania fixed on her. You went out and bought a knife and waited with it in your purse until she left to go home. And because she was fired it wasn't a long wait. You followed her home and killed her—as the ripper in Brampton would have killed you if Charlie hadn't shot him. So—"

There wasn't anywhere to go from the "So—" and it hung there. When it got tired of hanging there, Sweeney said, "You took the statuette home and —did you make a fetish of it, Yolanda? It must have been something like that. Did you worship it with a ritual that involved a knife? Or what?"

No answer yet, and he thought her eyes were starting to glaze a little, staring at him. He went on talking because he was afraid of what would happen when he stopped.

"And you killed twice more. Each time a beautiful blonde. Each had passed your place on State Street just before she was killed. I'd guess that each time was just after some mystical ritual with the statuette after which you went down to the street and followed—and killed—the first woman who went by and who was blonde and beautiful, who fitted your fixation.

"And it wasn't until after that third killing that Doc Greene suddenly found out or suddenly realized that it was *you* who'd been doing them. He didn't know about the statuette then but somehow he learned or realized who the Ripper was. And it scared him stiff.

"He would have been in a beautiful mess if the truth came out. They'd merely put you in an institution again, but Doc— I don't know exactly what grounds they'd get him on but they'd get him plenty. They'd throw the book at him. So he tried something pretty desperate. Did you know it was he who attacked you that night, Yolanda?"

If she'd only answer—

He said, "Doc tried a really heroic cure. Shock treatment. He thought being attacked again might reverse your fixation—at least put you back into the type of insanity you had before. And *anything* would be better than having you homicidal. He probably figured he could handle anything short of homicidal insanity.

"So he attacked you that night in the hallway. Of course he wouldn't have used an ordinary knife or razor—because he didn't want to hurt you physically. What he used would have been a piece of wood, say, with a razor blade projecting ou. only an eighth of an inch or less so it would make just a surface cut.

"And unorthodox as his psychiatry was, it worked—up to a point. If he'd known, then, about the statuette and had hunted it up in your apartment while you were in the hospital you might not have gone haywire again.

"But he didn't know about the statuette until after I broke the story in today's paper. He must have had a hunch all along that I was going to crack this thing though, because he kept in touch with me, pretending he was interested in getting the Ripper caught so *you'd* be safe from another attack. We had a lot of fun, Doc and I. I'm sorry he's—"

HE took a deep breath. He said, "But when Doc read today's paper he learned about the statuette and saw that it was what had set you off. So he decided to get it away from you right away. He went up to your flat this afternoon with an *empty* box that would hold it.

"He didn't want to be seen carrying a package *out* that he hadn't brought *in*. He didn't want anyone who might be watching your place to wonder what was in the package. He was still gambling his life to save you and this time he lost.

"He found the statuette—in your dresser or closet or wherever you kept it—and the knife with it. He had both of them in his hands and the sight of him touching your fetish threw you into —well, you sicked Devil on him, and Devil killed him."

Sweeney glanced down at Devil and wished he hadn't.

He looked back at Bessie Wilson. He said, "You didn't k n o w for sure whether he was dead or not, down there in the courtyard, and you didn't know what he'd tell the police if he wasn't, so you ran. But he didn't tell on you, Yolanda.

"Instead—because he knew he was dying—the damn fool took the rap for you. He said *he* was the Ripper. He must have thought or at least hoped

that once the statuette was broken and you didn't have it any more, you'd be all right again, even without him."

He stared at her and opened his mouth to ask the sixty-five dollar question—*Are you? Are you all right now?*

But he didn't have to ask it, because the answer was there, in her eyes.

Madness.

Her right hand fumbled for the tab of the zipper of her housecoat, found it, zipped downward. It fell down in a circle about her bare feet. Sweeney caught his breath a little, just as he had that night when he had looked through the glass into the hallway.

Reaching behind her she opened the top left drawer of the dresser, felt inside it. Her hand came out holding a knife, a brand new eight-inch carving knife.

A nude high priestess holding the sacrificial knife.

Sweeney sweated. He started to raise his hands and the dog growled and crouched before he'd moved them an inch. He quit moving them.

He made his voice quiet and steady. "Don't, Yolanda. I'm not the one you want to kill. I'm not blond or beautiful. I'm not a prototype of Bessie Wilson, who was attacked by a maniac—"

He was watching her eyes and it came to him that she didn't understand a word he was saying, that the connection had broken, just when he did not know. Yet she had started a step forward when he had stopped speaking and had stood still, the knife in her hand and ready—but words, the sound of his voice, had arrested her in midstep. Words, not what he said, but the fact that he was talking—

Her foot was moving again, the knife coming up. Again Sweeney took the mere ghost of a backward step and again the dog growled and crouched to spring at his throat.

"Four score and seven years ago," Sweeney said, "our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . . ."

Yolanda stood still again, an almost cataleptic stillness.

Sweat was running down Sweeney's sides from his armpits. He said, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether—uh—that nation—That's all I remember. Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow . . ."

He finished Mary and the lamb, hit high spots of the Rubaiyat, Hamlet's soliloquy. After a while he remembered that he could repeat himself, and after a while he found that—if he did it a sixteenth of an inch at a time—he could ease his way back toward the wall behind him and, finally, lean against it.

But he couldn't move, even a sixteenth of an inch, toward the door or toward Yolanda. He couldn't raise his hands.

And after a time—a long time—his voice was so tired he couldn't talk any more. But he kept on talking anyway. If he stopped talking for as much as ten seconds he was going to die.

OUTSIDE—Sweeney could tell from the one small window of the room, on the side opposite from the wall he leaned against—it got dark. Years later a clock somewhere tolled midnight. Centuries after that, the window began to get light again.

". . . Beneath a spreading chestnut tree," said Sweeney hoarsely, "the village smithy stands. The smith, a mighty man is he, beneath the spreading chestnut tree. A rose by any other name would waste its fragrance on the desert air and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. And when the pie was opened they all began to sing . . ."

Every muscle of his body ached. He marveled, with what was left of his mind, at how Yolanda could stand there—incredibly beautiful, incredibly naked—and not move at all. Catalepsy, of course, hypnosis, whatever you called it, it was hard to believe—

". . . Alas, poor Yorick!" said Sweeney. "I knew him, Horatio—a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent—uh—the owl and the pussycat went to sea, in a beautiful pea green boat . . ."

It got lighter slowly. It was nine o'clock in the morning before there was a knock at the door. An authoritative knock.

Sweeney raised his voice, with as much effort as it would have taken him to raise a piano. It was a hoarse croak. "Bline? Come in with your gun ready. The dog will jump one of us."

The dog, growling, had moved to a

position where he could watch both Sweeney and the knocked-on door. But the door moved and Sweeney didn't and the dog jumped at Bline in the doorway. But Bline had been warned. His coat was wrapped around his forearm, and as the dog leaped and closed its jaws on the coat, the barrel of Bline's pistol tapped the dog's skull.

"The mouse ran up the clock," Sweeney was saying in a voice that wasn't much above a hoarse whisper; "the clock struck one— Thank heaven you finally came, Cap. I knew you'd see holes in Doc's story when you had time to think it out and that you'd come looking for Yolanda and get to her the same way I did.

"Listen, Cap, I have to keep on talking and I can't stop. She isn't even looking at you and doesn't know what's going on except that if I stop talking— Walk up on her from that side and get the knife."

Bline got the knife. Sweeney, still mumbling hoarsely, slid slowly down the wall. . . .

And then it was late evening. Godfrey was there on the park bench and Sweeney sat down beside him. "Thought you were working," God said.

"I was. But I broke such a big story Wally let me talk him into getting off awhile without pay. A week, two weeks, or whenever I get back."

"You sound hoarse, Sweeney. Did you spend a night with that dame you were raving about?"

"That's why I'm hoarse," said Sweeney. "Listen, God, this time I left money, quite a bit of money, with my landlady. But I held out three hundred. Do you think we can get drunk on three hundred bucks?"

God turned his shaggy head to look at Sweeney. "If we want to badly enough. If you want something badly enough, you can get anything you want, Sweeney. Like spending a night with that dame. I told you you could."

Sweeney shuddered. He pulled two flat pint bottles out of the side pockets of his coat and handed one of them to God.

"Stan, Wake Up! There's Been a Murder—And the Police Are Looking for You—"

MY husband was sound asleep in the living room. I shook him. "Sweetheart," I said, trying to keep my voice steady, "sweetheart, you're in a jam, you're in very bad trouble."

He opened one eye. "Huh?"

"Your dancing teacher. Anita Farrell. The Crescent Dancing Studio. Stan—"

"Oh," he smiled sleepily at me. "You know about that. Well, I'll tell you why I—"

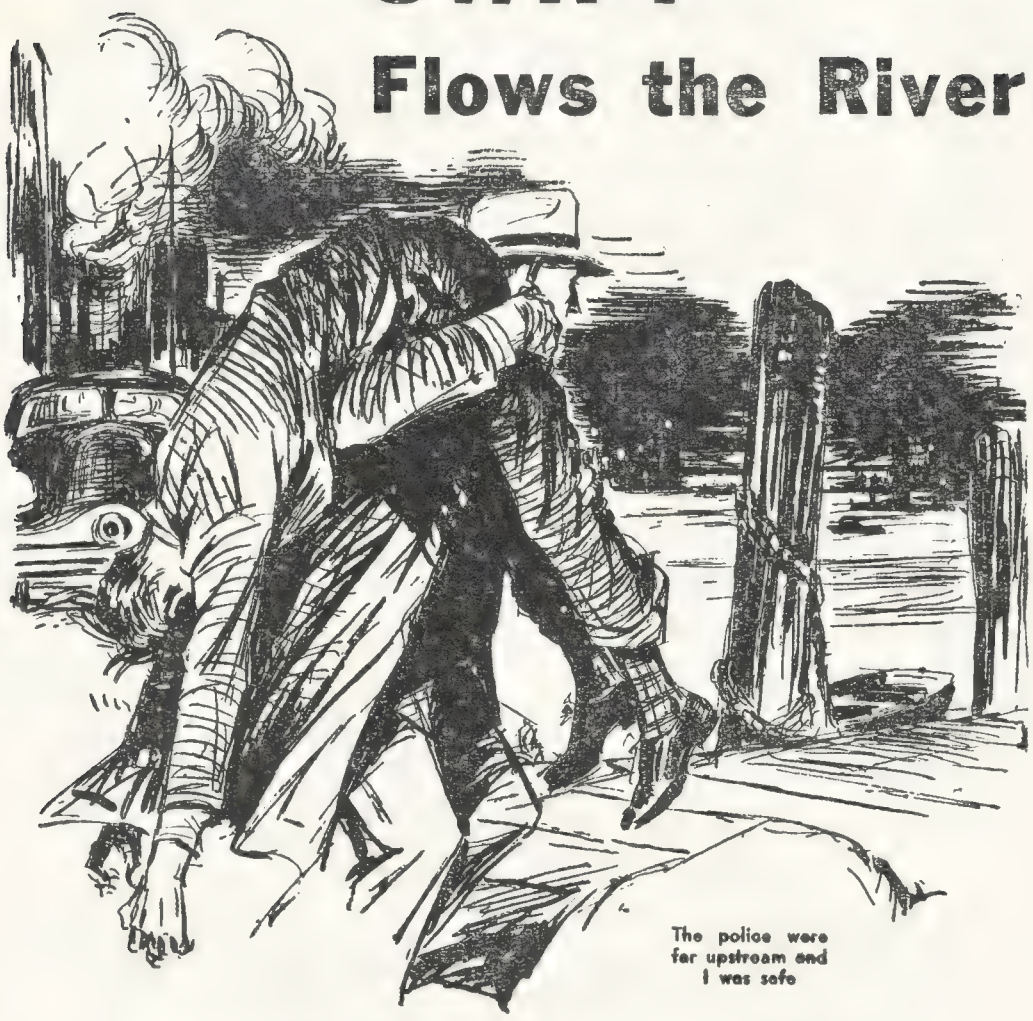
"Stan, your teacher was murdered, and the cops think you did it. They think you're the killer—and the papers are calling you the Waltzer . . ."

He stood up. He was wide awake now. "The police," he said, "don't know I'm the Waltzer."

"No," I announced, "because I stole the appointment book with your name in it . . . I took it from the dead girl's hands!"

That's how WALTZ WITH DEATH by Kelley Roos begins—and it goes on from there to a series of amazing escapades as Judith Coulter strives to prove her husband's innocence and find the real killer. It's a tense mystery novelet of a murder frame—featured next issue. Look forward to this surprising, suspenseful, long novelet—it will hold you breathless!

SWIFT Flows the River



The police were far upstream and I was safe

Carson killed his man, threw the body in the river, and calmly waited for Nature to provide his alibi!

I FINISHED my breakfast with a few minutes to spare that morning and went upstairs to say good-by to my wife before going to the office.

Celia was propped up in bed with two pillows behind her back, wearing a pink silk bedjacket, and she looked adorably pink and white and childish with the morning sun slanting across her platinum hair.

I stood in the doorway and looked at her and knew our leaving Ohio hadn't been a mistake after all. I couldn't find it in my heart to blame her for what had

By BRETT HALLIDAY

happened back home. She was just a child, and natural prey for a scoundrel like Marvin Drake.

She looked up with a little start of surprise, and smiled at me across the swinging bedside table, still in position in front of her, though her empty breakfast tray was on a table beside her.

"Darling!" she said. "Won't you be late at the office?"

I told her I still had a few minutes, and then I crossed the room to stand beside her, making a pretense of anger when I saw the uncapped fountain pen and a box of writing paper and envelopes before her.

"So that's where my pen is," I said. "I missed it when I put on my coat."

She carried out the pretense by being very humble, hastily recapping it and making me lean down so she could replace it in my breast pocket and pat my cheek with her flame-tipped fingers while she explained.

"I had Ella borrow it from your coat so I could write some letters. I can't find mine anywhere."

I kissed her forehead and she clung to me for a moment, and I had a good feeling that everything was all right again.

I was humming to myself as I went downstairs and I even forgot to be irritated by the watery imitation of sunlight that greeted me when I opened the front door. The mailbox beside the door showed three square envelopes sticking out of the slot where the maid had left them to be picked up by the postman. I took them from the slot and glanced at the addresses as I went around the side and back to the double garage to get my car out.

Two of the letters were addressed to old neighbors in Cincinnati, Ohio, which had been our home until a month ago. The third was addressed to Mr. Milton Oakes, 1801 12th Street, City.

I didn't know anyone named Oakes. I didn't know that Celia knew anyone by that name. I didn't know—and I was annoyed by the thought—that Celia knew any man in Surf City well enough to be writing notes to him.

I put the three letters in my coat pocket and drove downtown to a parking lot and went up to my office on the fourth floor of Surf City's one and only medical building.

MY NURSE was taking off her hat in the foyer when I entered. I nodded and headed into my private office.

"Please don't disturb me until I ring, Miss Taylor," I told her.

I sat at my desk and laid two of the letters aside and carefully studied the one addressed locally. Like most things she did, Celia had sealed the envelope carelessly. Only the tip of the pointed flap was fastened and it came loose easily. I drew out the folded sheet of heavy notepaper and opened it. Neatly engraved across the top were the words: Mrs. John Carson, 408 Cedarhurst Drive, Surf City, N. J.

Darling Marv:

You *must* not telephone again. I'm afraid the maid will tell John. You shouldn't have dared to come here, but it's been horrible without you. Tomorrow, Thursday, is John's night to play poker and he never gets home till six in the morning. I have to entertain some silly women at bridge ad they may stay late, but I will positively meet you at the corner of Maple and Second at 2:30 A.M.

Wear your white flannels and blue coat and Panama hat, so I'll be sure it's you when I drive by in my coupé. Please wait there for me and don't be angry if I'm a teeny bit late.

Love and kisses,
Your own Ceil

I read the letter twice. Then I pushed it aside very carefully. I was proud that my hand didn't tremble as I did so. For this, I had disrupted my life and given up my practice in Ohio. I was afraid to let myself think. I tried to make my mind a blank, and remembered the folded morning paper in my pocket.

I settled back to make myself read the morning news, and a local story caught my attention at once. It was captioned:

WEEK-OLD MYSTERY SOLVED

Smart detective work by Sergeant A. L. Mandragon of the Surf City Homicide Bureau resulted last night in identification of the corpse found floating in the Argule River last Thursday as Thomas P. Lester, owner of a truck farm five miles west of Surf City.

Because the body was naked when discovered by two small boys as it floated under Five-Mile bridge and the features were so battered as to almost preclude recognition, identification was well-nigh impossible until Sergeant Mandragon became convinced by a series of brilliant deductions that the body must have been placed in the water several miles up-river from Five-Mile bridge. By canvassing all the farms in that vicinity, it was ascertained that Mr. Lester, who was something of a recluse, had been missing for several days, and neigh-

bors who were brought in to view the body at City Morgue last night agreed on the identification.

"It wasn't any great shucks to figure it out," Sergeant Mandragon disclaimed modestly when interviewed after his triumph. "The doctors said the body had been in the water about eight hours and all I had to do was check the current and figure the speed the river had been flowing during those eight hours. Repeated tests indicated the flow had been slightly over half a mile an hour. That started us looking about five miles out and that took us right to Lester's farm.

"It was lucky," the sergeant pointed out, "that the sharp-eyed lads noticed the body at dusk as they did. Had it not been discovered before darkness fell, the current would have carried it right out to sea during the night and it might never have been recovered."

Police theorize that some hobo . . .

I had read enough. I put the paper aside and read my wife's note to her lover again. A plan for murder had come to me, detailed in outline and crystal-clear. I was beginning to establish a good practise here, and Celia and I had been happy this past month. We could go on being happy only if Marvin Drake were dead.

I got out my fountain pen and uncapped it—the same pen Celia had used this morning to write the note. I carefully added a figure "one in front of the time Celia had set for the clandestine meeting. There was no way anyone could possibly guess it had not been written 12:30 A. M. originally. Only Celia knew the truth. And in the remote contingency that the note should come to her notice after his death, she was certain to believe she had written it that way herself in a moment of absent-mindedness.

I resealed the envelope carefully, took all three letters out to put them in a sidewalk mailbox myself.

CELIA was busy in the living room arranging things for two tables of bridge when I left for my poker game next evening. I went to the garage and backed her gray coupé out instead of the blue sedan I generally drive. She couldn't see the driveway from the living room and I intended to have the gray coupé back before the bridge party ended.

Five of us gathered for the weekly penny-ante session at Pete Thorgenson's house. Pete was a local hardware merchant, and there were two of my fellow physicians who had introduced me to the game soon after I settled in Surf City. Alex Downes, the local sheriff, was the fifth member of the party. I couldn't have found four better witnesses to provide me with an alibi for murder if I had handpicked them. We played around a green baize table in Pete Thorgenson's cellar, five-cent ante, and the game never broke up until daylight. None of us were drinking men, but Pete's refrigerator in the kitchen was always well-stocked with beer paid for by taking a cut out of each pot that ran above a quarter.

The others were already at it when I arrived, and as I sat down I told them, "If the telephone rings, it'll likely be for me. I told the answering service to switch any calls they get to your phone, Pete."

The other two doctors grinned at that, and made jesting remarks about a younger man coming and stealing their patients. But it was good-natured raillery and we settled down at once to the serious business of the night.

I played carefully, my usual cautious game, and by twelve-thirty I was a couple of dollars ahead. I threw down my next hand when the sheriff opened for a nickel.

"Anybody else want a glass of beer?" I got up and asked.

The others declined, but Dr. Barstow said he could do with a bottle. I climbed the stairs to the swinging doorway, went through the kitchen and into the hallway beyond, where I lifted the telephone and dialed police headquarters.

When a sleepy voice answered, I said low and excitedly, "Get somebody out to Three-Mile bridge right away. There's a dead man floating downstream—wearing white pants and a blue coat. Three-Mile bridge."

I hung up on the policeman's questions, went into the kitchen and uncapped two bottles of beer, was downstairs and in my seat in time to draw cards for the next deal.

Thirty minutes later I again threw my hand in and carried my empty glass upstairs. This time I dialed my own office number. After it rang four times, a voice from the answering service switched in and said Dr. Carson could be reached at Pete Thorgenson's number.

I hung up and dialed only three numbers this time, replaced the receiver and stepped back into the kitchen to get

a bottle of beer. It was a parlor trick I had learned long ago from an electrician who told me that every dial exchange has a certain combination of three numbers which, if dialed, will cause that telephone to ring immediately afterward. I had experimented in the privacy of my office for hours that afternoon until I found the three-number combination for Pete's exchange.

The telephone rang as soon as I turned my back. I let it ring twice more while I got out a bottle of beer before answering.

"Hello," I said into the dead line. "Yes. This is Dr. Carson. An accident, eh? I'll come at once."

I hurried downstairs and stuck my head in the smoke-filled basement.

"What time do you fellows have?" I asked the other players. "My watch says three minutes after one. Devilish time for a call, but there's been some sort of accident. Take care of my chips if I don't get back."

The sheriff and one of the doctors looked at their watches and confirmed the time as 1:03. I went out hurriedly and got in Celia's coupé and drove directly to the corner of Maple and Second. There were no houses close to the corner, and the nearest street light was half a block away. I slowed and veered in to the curb when I saw a man waiting there in the dim light, wearing white trousers, a dark coat and Panama hat.

Marvin Drake spun a cigarette away and stepped forward to unlatch the door and stooped to get in as I stopped.

"I've been waiting—" he began irritably, and I hit him on top of the head with a half-foot length of lead pipe.

He slumped down on the floor and was silent. I dragged his limp body inside, pulled the door shut and put the coupé in motion. Following a course I had mapped out earlier, I traveled deserted side streets, that paralleled the river, until I came to a dead-end street that led down to the river a little more than a quarter of a mile below Three-Mile bridge. I turned off my headlights before reaching the dead-end street and drove between dark warehouses to the wharf. There a long wooden pier extended out over the water.

I stopped and got out and went around to drag the body of my wife's lover from the coupé, felt for his pulse with professional calm and found my single shrewd blow had killed him.

IT WASN'T difficult to sling Drake's corpse on my shoulder and carry it out on the pier. It was very quiet, and a damp chill mist rose from the swirling black water. About a quarter of a mile up-stream, in the vicinity of Three-Mile bridge, a launch was circling in the river with its searchlight cutting through the mist. I knew it was the police, searching for the body of the man I carried on my shoulder.

Thus, my one worry was dissipated. I had anticipated the danger of being seen at this point, thinking of course that the fool police would be searching the river downstream, where the body would normally have been carried by the current during the half hour that had elapsed since I reported seeing it at Three-Mile bridge. Instead, they were still far upstream and I was safe.

I dropped my burden off the end of the pier, hurled the piece of lead pipe after it and hurried back to my car. I drove out to the street before switching on my headlights.

Two cars were parked in front of the house and my wife's bridge party was still in progress when I returned. I drove her coupé into the garage, parked it beside my sedan and padlocked the double doors. Celia and seven other chattering women were in the living room when I entered.

"I had to leave my game for an emergency call that turned out to be a dud," I explained, answering my wife's surprised exclamation. "It was either an accident that wasn't as bad as it seemed at first, or else some practical joker. So I think I'll just stay home and kibitz on you ladies."

Celia was upset by my return, and worried because I insisted on staying, but she had to accept my presence with the best grace she could muster. I kibitzed and was charming to the ladies and insisted on helping serve refreshments, and when they all left a few minutes after two o'clock and Celia again began insisting I return to my game, I took her arm firmly and drew her away from the littered living room to the stairs.

"I hardly ever have you to myself since we came to Surf City," I complained. "But I've decided to turn over

a new leaf, and from now on we're going to see more of each other."

I began by sleeping with Celia in her own bedroom that night. She was still lying tense and wakeful when I turned over to sleep. I realized I could have relieved her anxiety about the broken assignation with Marvin Drake, but I repressed the impulse to do so, and slept calmly.

I was downstairs at breakfast alone next morning when Ella came in to say there was a policeman to see me. I told her to show him in, and Sergeant Mandragon entered a few minutes later. He was a tall, spare man, with a seamed face and a sunburned bald head. He introduced himself, declined a cup of coffee, and plunged into the reason for his visit without delay.

"We had another murder last night, Doctor Carson," he said. "Another corpse fished out of the river."

"Indeed?" I tried to look surprised. "Sounds like an epidemic. I read in the paper about the sterling detective work you did in identifying the other victim."

"I wondered if you'd read about that case. This one is different. The victim came to town only recently. He's been living here under the name of Milton Oakes."

"Oakes? I don't recall the name. I'm a newcomer too, and—"

"I know. From Cincinnati! That's why I figure you might know him better by his right name. Marvin Drake."

"Marvin Drake? From Cincinnati? Of course, I knew Drake back there. Do you mean he was here under an assumed name?"

"Seems like," Sergeant Mandragon said phlegmatically. "I hate to be the one to bring you this, but it's bound to come out sooner or later. This note from your wife was found in his apartment." He handed a square envelope across the table to me.

"My wife? Celia—" I wet my lips miserably and looked down at the envelope as though I didn't believe what I was seeing.

"You'd better read it, sir. Near as we can make out, Drake was keeping this appointment with your wife when he was murdered."

I made my hand tremble as I drew the note out. I forced myself to read every remembered word, then crumpled it slowly in my fist.

THE sergeant leaned over and took the note from my hand. "We'll be needing that for evidence, sir."

"That devil," I whispered hollowly, staring straight ahead. "So he followed us here. He wasn't satisfied with breaking up our home once—"

"I got that on the long distance early this morning," Mandragon told me. "About the trouble you'd had back there and how you threatened to kill him if he saw your wife again."

"It's true," I admitted flatly. "I think I would have killed him if I'd known he was here—forcing himself on Celia. Good Heavens, Sergeant! Don't tell me that you suspect my wife?"

The sergeant shook his head. "I've been doing some checking. Seems like Mrs. Carson's time is accounted for up to two o'clock anyhow. It happened before that."

"When?"

"Near as we can tell, about one o'clock. The body was found at three-thirty, and without an autopsy Doc Jones guesses he'd been dead two-three hours. Being a medical man yourself, you know they won't come much closer'n that with an autopsy."

"That's true," I said. "It's always difficult after a body has been in the water." I almost made the fatal mistake of mentioning the telephone call I had made at 12:30, the call on which I based my alibi, and I caught my tongue just in time. Instead, I said angrily, "I presume you've checked up on my actions also."

He nodded. "I've talked to Alex and Pete and the others. They all agree you left Pete's at exactly three minutes after one. An emergency call, they said."

"That's right. Someone called to say there'd been an accident on the highway just north of town. I drove out but couldn't find a trace of anyone. It was either some practical joker or else they'd cleared everything away before I got there. You can verify that call by checking with the answering service," I added.

"They verify a call at one o'clock. Gave the caller Pete's number like you'd told them. But the way I figure it, that might be a blind you'd fixed up beforehand—to give you a reason to get away from that game."

"Are you seriously accusing me?" I demanded incredulously.

"I guess I'm supposed to say right

here that anything you say may be used against you, Dr. Carson. You'd had trouble with this fellow Drake back in Ohio. If you found out he was meeting your wife here on the sly—" The sergeant shook his head sadly.

"I give you my word of honor I had no idea Marvin Drake was in Surf City," I said. "But that's something I'd have difficulty proving, I suppose. Seems to me it narrows down to the actual time of the man's death. I can't *prove* I was out looking for a highway accident between one and one-thirty. Who discovered the body? Under what circumstances?"

"There was a phone call first. A body was reported floating under Three-Mile bridge. The caller described the clothes and everything and hung up quick. Couple of men got on the river in a launch right away, but didn't find the body till three-thirty. On account of the current, I guess."

"What time was that telephone call received?" I held my breath and my nails dug into clenched palms as Sergeant Mandragon consulted a small notebook with maddening deliberation. If the time hadn't been noted correctly—if a careless policeman at headquarters—

BUT it was all right. I relaxed and didn't try to hide my relief when he said, "The call came through at exactly twelve-thirty-one."

"Good Heavens, man! That clears me. Don't you see? I was playing poker with four men until one o'clock."

"Thing is—way I figure it—that first phone call maybe was a phony. Something like the one you claim to have got at one o'clock." The sergeant looked at me blandly.

"What gives you that idea?"

"Trouble is," he explained, "the body was finally found *below* the bridge. We wasted all that time looking upstream."

"That," I said angrily, "is the sheerest nonsense I ever heard. By your own statement in the paper, the Argule River flows at the rate of half a mile an hour down to the ocean."

"I recollected that piece in the paper," the sergeant agreed. "And I figured right away this smart trick was pulled by somebody from inland—someone who hadn't ever lived on the coast before. You see, I knew right off when we found the body below Three-Mile bridge that the phone call was a lie. The body couldn't have been seen floating under the bridge because the water had been flowing upstream steady since the tide turned at nine-fifty."

"The tide?" My mouth was dry and blood pounded in my head.

Sergeant Mandragon nodded carelessly. "Sure. We get a six-foot tide this time of year. It was running out when that body floated down last week. Too bad it changed on you to mess up your careful figuring."

Sergeant Mandragon spoke with real compassion. He got up and gestured toward the door, hesitated awkwardly, "Maybe you'd like to say good-bye to your wife?"

I shook my head and went with him.

JOHN CALHOON SEEKS THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY OF HIS WIFE'S STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE IN

THE DARK DOORWAY

An Exciting Novelet by **WYATT BLASSINGAME** Next Issue!

Oddly, Dot Hall's only chance to escape the chair is to convince the police—that she has killed!

The DOG

CHAPTER I

BLOOD was on my mind that night, but it was blood of the French Revolution. I was correcting Modern European History papers while Dot was at a hen party at Marie Cannon's. At midnight I went to bed, knowing that between bridge and chit-chat there was no telling when Dot would be home.

The sound of the car pulling into the driveway woke me. As we have no garage in our bungalow-type stucco house, we leave the car out in the open on the cinder driveway. I heard Dot enter the house through the back door, and then I was listening to water running in the kitchen.

a novelet by **BRUNO FISCHER**

"Mrs. Hall, is this the spot?" Ricardo asked

DIED FIRST

It ran for a long time—too long for her to be getting a drink and she certainly wouldn't be washing herself at the kitchen sink. Drowsily I was wondering what she was up to now, and I wondered a lot more when she turned off the water and left the house again. The radium clock on the dresser said five minutes after one.

I turned on my side and looked through the window. Dot had left the car's headlights on and she was walking into their glare. The pail she carried in her right hand was evidently full of water. The weight of it made her neat hips sway. She opened the back sedan

door, switched on the overhead light, dug a dripping scrubbing brush out of the pail and leaned inside the car.

So that explained her antics. No doubt somebody had spilled liquid on the upholstery and she was trying to scrub it off before it dried. I dug my head into the pillow to shut out the glow of the headlights coming in through the window.

I was almost asleep when the night lamp went on in the bedroom.

"Are you awake, darling?" Dot asked.

"Um, umph, um," I mumbled, turning my head to let her know I was too sleepy for conversation.

BUT as nothing ever stopped Dot from talking, my desire for slumber didn't. I'd trained myself to absorb her chatter without listening to it, and that was what I did then until a startling sentence jerked me fully awake.

"I couldn't get all the blood off," she had said.

"Blood?" I breathed, opening my eyes wide. "Did you say blood?"

Dot was taking a nightgown out of a drawer. "He died on the way to the doctor," she said complacently. "I feel like a murderer."

She straightened up with the nightgown in her hand. The soft, dim night light played over her tightly and precisely formed body, and her face was as guileless as a doll's.

"Who died?" I demanded hoarsely.

"The dog, of course," she said, dropping the nightgown over her head.

I sank back on the bed. A dog, of course. Well, what had I really expected?

"I wasn't going to tell you because you're always criticizing my driving," she explained. "Like when I smashed a fender last week. But I really couldn't help what happened tonight. The dog ran right under the wheel. Then when I got home I noticed the blood in the car and I tried to wash it off, but I couldn't quite because it had dried. I decided to tell you because you'll see it tomorrow."

I was drowsy again, but puzzled. "How does blood get inside a car when you run over a dog?"

"He was still breathing, so I took him to the vet, but he was dead when I got there. The dog, I mean. The poor little thing."

She put out the light and got into bed, but that didn't stop her voice. She told me about the dollar and seventeen cents she had lost at bridge and that Ida Walker looked dowdy and Marie Cannon stunning and Edith Bauer—

"How about some sleep?" I complained.

She was quiet—for about a minute, it seemed to me. Then she was shaking me.

"Bernie," she whispered, "there's somebody sneaking about outside with a flashlight."

The radium clock said ten minutes after three, which meant that I'd actually been asleep about two hours. Dot was sitting up, and past the vague outline of her shoulder and through the window I saw a splotch of light move along the side of the car.

"Maybe he's trying to steal the car," she whispered.

"Did you leave the key in the ignition?"

It didn't surprise me when she admitted that she thought she had. Snorting, I got out of bed and went to the window. Whoever held the flashlight seemed to have lost interest in the car and was walking toward the street.

"He's going away," I said hopefully. I was a man who liked to avoid trouble.

"I wonder what he wanted."

"I know what I want," I said. "Sleep."

I had one leg on the bed when the doorbell rang. I froze half on the bed, listening. There are few things more disturbing than a doorbell ringing at three in the morning.

"That must be the thief," Dot whispered.

I roused myself. "Thieves don't ring doorbells."

"Well, it's somebody," Dot pointed out.

It certainly was somebody. The doorbell kept on ringing. I fumbled into slippers and robe, went into the living room, turned on the light, opened the front door.

THE man who entered held a flashlight in his hand, so he was the same one I had seen prowling outside. He had more paunch than chest and a lumpy face.

"Mr. Bernard Hall?" he said.

I nodded. "What is it?"

He didn't answer. He stepped past me into the living room, looked it over as if he were thinking of renting it, then

fixed me with rather sad eyes.

"My boy Steve is in your History class. Stephan Ricardo."

"Ah, yes," I said, using my teacher-parent manner. But that was absurd. This man hadn't got me out of bed at three in the morning to discuss his son's scholastic problems. Then I remembered what Stephan Ricardo had told me his father did for a living, and I tensed.

"You're a detective," I said.

"That's right." Ricardo massaged his jowls. "Seems there's blood in your car."

"Is that what you were looking at with your flashlight?"

He nodded. "Uh-huh. There was an attempt made to wash it off, but it was soaked into the floor rug."

At that moment Dot came into the living room. She wore her flowered housecoat over the nightgown.

"I'm the one you want," she said. "I suppose I shouldn't have left the body in the bushes."

Ricardo pushed his hat back from his brow and blinked a couple of times. "You admit you did it, Mrs. Hall?"

"Should I have reported it to the police?" She handed him that disarming smile of hers. "The thing is, I didn't want any trouble."

"No," Ricardo said softly, "I guess you didn't want trouble." He kept looking at Dot as if he didn't quite believe she existed. "Why did you do it, Mrs. Hall?"

"It was an accident. He ran in front of the car."

Ricardo shook his head sorrowfully. "That won't get you anywhere, Mrs. Hall. His head was smashed in, but there were no other marks on his body."

"But that's impossible. I held him in my arms and his head looked all right. He seemed to be injured internally. He died before I could get him to the vet."

"The vet?" Ricardo said, blinking.

"Dr. Harrison, the veterinary on Mill Street," she explained patiently. "Where else would you take a dog?"

Ricardo opened his mouth, but he didn't say what he started to. Instead he drew in air. "Suppose, Mrs. Hall, you tell me all about it."

Dot settled herself in the armchair and placidly crossed her fine legs. I stuck a cigarette between my lips and noticed that the match shook in my hand. I didn't for a moment believe that a detective would awaken and question her at three in the morning because a dog had been run over.

"I was driving to a bridge game at Marie Cannon's tonight," she said. "About two blocks from here a little black dog ran in front of the car and I couldn't stop in time. I got out and there was the poor creature in terrible agony. He was a little thing, all black with white paws and a white splotch on his face. I don't know what breed, though he had some Spitz in him, because when I was a little girl I had a Spitz that was the darlingest—"

"What time was this?" Ricardo broke in.

"Close to eight-thirty. Marie Cannon was anxious that we get to her house at eight-thirty, and it was just about that when I left here. I would be late, but I couldn't leave an injured dog lying in the road, so I put him in the car and drove to the vet."

"To Dr. Harrison on Mill Street," Ricardo said rather grimly. "A good seven miles away, though you were late."

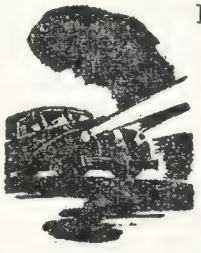
"Do you know of a nearer veterinary?"

Ricardo admitted that he didn't.

"So I had no choice," Dot said. "But when I got there, I saw that the poor dog was dead, so there was no point to taking him in to Dr. Harrison. I drove back to East Billford and left the dog in some bushes beside the road."

"Just like that," Ricardo sighed.

CHAPTER II



DOT FLUSHED guiltily. "I suppose it was a cruel thing to do, but by then it was about ten minutes after nine and the bridge game couldn't start until I got there because I made the fourth and Marie Cannon would be furious with me. And, after all, the dog was dead, wasn't he? And I did look to see if he had a license, but he didn't have even a collar. He was obviously a stray dog, and I didn't know what else to do with him."

After that gush of words there was a silence. I filled it by saying, "I suppose killing a dog should be reported to the police. That's the law, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh." He glanced at me and then returned his sad gaze to Dot. "Did you get blood on your dress when you picked him up?"

"I'm sure I didn't. One of the women at the bridge game would have noticed if I had." She frowned. "He didn't seem to bleed at all, but he must have, because I saw blood in the car when I got home hours later."

"Where did you leave the—ah-body?"

"On Pine Road, in a section where there are no houses. Just this side of that dirt road."

"Wilson Lane," he said.

"Yes, that's it. A short distance past Wilson Lane, coming toward town, there are thick bushes on the right side. That's where I left him."

Ricardo nodded and scratched his cheeks with the backs of his fingers. He was a plump man with too much waist and jowls, but the set of his lumpy face frightened me.

"You better get dressed, Mrs. Hall," he said, "and go there with me."

Her blue eyes widened. "You mean right now?"

"Right now."

"I'm going too," I said.

"Sure," Ricardo said.

We went into the bedroom to put on clothes.

"I don't understand why they make so much trouble about a dog being run over," Dot complained as she slipped her shoes on. "Of course I feel bad about it, but getting people out of bed in the middle of the night! Why doesn't he just give me a ticket and I'll pay the fine?"

I didn't say anything. My stomach was sickishly empty.

We drove in Ricardo's sedan, the three of us in the front seat.

On the way, Dot said, "I suppose Al Wilcox saw me carry the dog into the bushes. He lives down the street and knows me. I saw his white police car pass when I returned to my car."

"That's right, Mrs. Hall," Ricardo said grimly.

It was less than a mile to the spot. Three cars were parked along the side of the road, and by the light of a couple of powerful electric lanterns I saw five or six men gathered on the narrow grassy stretch between the shoulder of the road and the line of thick bushes. One of them was Al Wilcox in his policeman's uniform.

"All these men because a dog was killed!" Dot said. Even she was catching on that something bigger than that must be up.

Ricardo had no comment. He led us across the road and then I saw the long shape under the canvas. The men had become silent and were looking at Dot.

"Mrs. Hall, is this the spot?" Ricardo asked.

She nodded and slipped her hand through my arm. She frowned at the size of the thing under the canvas.

"Give her a look, Cal," Ricardo said

Wilcox bent over and gripped one end of the canvas and pulled it down. Dot uttered a shrill scream. I felt her sag against my side, clinging to my arm.

"Why that's—that's Emmett Walker!" she gasped. "I played bridge with his wife tonight."

It was Emmett Walker, all right, but no longer the handsome insurance agent Dot and I had known for years. His blond hair was matted with dried blood and some of it had run in ragged streaks over his face.

"Cover him up, Al," Ricardo said wearily. He turned to Dot, and there was controlled fury in his voice. "He was murdered, Mrs. Hall."

"But—but where's the dog?" Dot stammered.

"There is no dog, Mrs. Hall."

"But I left him right there in those bushes."

"No, Mrs. Hall," Ricardo said. "You struck Emmett Walker over the head with something and killed him. You dragged him into your car and drove here and dragged him into the bushes. That's how the blood got in your car."

"It's not true!" Dot had recovered from the shock and was now merely indignant.

AT that point I should have said something. I should have come to my wife's defense. But even if I hadn't been too choked for words, I couldn't think of any that would do any good.

Al Wilcox spoke up. "I was passing here at a few minutes after nine, Mrs. Hall, when I saw you come out of these bushes and get into your car. At two o'clock I passed this way again, and by my headlights I saw what looked like a man's leg sticking out of the bushes. I investigated and found him."

"Well, I didn't do it," Dot said an-

grily. "Why would I want to kill Emmett Walker?"

"Suppose you tell us, Mrs. Hall."

Dot turned to me in exasperation. "You try to make him understand, darling."

I gulped air into my lungs. I said, "Of course you didn't do it," but my voice quavered.

Ricardo moved away from us to consult with the other policemen in undertones. When he returned to us, he asked Dot if the dress she had on was the one she had worn at the bridge game. She said that it was. Then he asked me for the keys to my car and handed them to Wilcox.

"Okay, let's go," Ricardo snapped.

I didn't ask him where. I knew where.

This time there were four of us in the sedan. I sat beside Ricardo who drove, and Dot sat in the back seat with another detective. Ricardo didn't waste time. He had questions for Dot as we drove.

"Where did you say that bridge game was?"

"At Marie Cannon's house."

"Is she the wife of George Cannon, the lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Who else was there?"

"There were only four of us. Besides Marie and myself, there were Edith Bauer and Ida Walker." Her voice broke a little. "Poor Ida! Who is going to break the news to her?"

"She knows already," Ricardo said. "She didn't take the news too hard."

"They haven't got along too well lately. There were rumors that Emmett wasn't—well, exactly faithful to her." Dot leaned forward toward the back of Ricardo's neck, and her voice was breathless. "Do you think that Ida killed him?"

"I know who killed him," Ricardo said crisply.

That ended all talk until we reached the County Building, which also contained police headquarters and the county jail. Dot was taken into an office on the second floor, but I got no farther than the door.

"You might as well go home," Ricardo told me. "Your wife is being held."

"What are you going to do to her—give her the third degree?"

His lumpy face smiled a little. "We're going to question her."

"She's entitled to have a lawyer present."

"Sure." He waved a pudgy hand. "You'll find a phone booth down the hall."

I went into the booth and dialed George Cannon's number. His voice was drowsy, but it got wide awake when I told him what was up.

"I'll be right there," he said.

I waited out in the hall. In ten minutes George Cannon arrived. His hair was mussed and his suit looked like a sack on his frail body, but that wasn't because he'd dressed in a hurry. He always managed to look seedy and dishevelled, though he was the most prominent lawyer in East Billford.

Briefly I gave him the details. His thin mouth tightened as he listened.

"Emmett was supposed to call for Ida tonight," he told me. "She waited in my house until one o'clock and then I drove her home. I think she suspected that he was out with another woman. And all that time he was dead."

"Don't stand here talking," I said. "God knows what they're doing to Dot."

"Oh, they won't be rough with a woman. You wait here, Bernie."

He knocked at the door through which Dot had been taken and was admitted.

FOR a full hour I paced that lonely hall before George came out.

Glumly he shook his head. "They've taken her up to a cell through another door. She hasn't been charged yet. There are still loose ends."

"How does it look?"

"It's too soon to tell," he said, not meeting my eyes. "If the blood in the car is a dog's, their circumstantial case will be shot." He patted my shoulder. "No use hanging around here. Go home and get some sleep."

He dropped me off at my house. Dawn was coming up, and in the grayness of it I saw that my car was gone. The police had taken it because it was evidence—evidence that might mean life or death.

The house was terribly empty. I went into the bedroom and there was her nightgown flung across the foot of the bed. I remembered how only a few hours ago I had watched her getting into that nightgown, and nobody could have looked less like a woman who had just murdered somebody.

She hadn't. She said so. She was flightly and talkative, but she had never before lied to me.

But she had never before had occasion to lie about murder. . . .

I tossed in bed for an hour and slept fitfully for another hour. Then the doorbell woke me. It was Herman Bauer, a fellow teacher at the high school. His wife Edith was an old friend of Dot's.

Herman, chubby and usually jolly, was now glum and embarrassed. He said that he had stopped off on his way to school to tell me that the police had questioned him and Edith.

"They got us out of bed at six-thirty this morning," Herman said. "They asked Edith about the bridge game last night. When Dot arrived, when she left, if she'd been in the house all that time, and so on. They also asked how well Dot and Emmett had known each other." Uneasily he fumbled with the brim of his hat. "Neither Edith nor I mentioned that Dot used to go out with Emmett."

"That was years ago," I said. "Before Dot and I were engaged."

"Of course." Herman watched his fingers on his hat. "But the police mightn't understand." He turned to the door. "If there's anything I can do for you, let me know."

After Herman Bauer was gone, I stood in the same spot for a long time. He had it all figured out, the way everybody else figured it and the police certainly did. I couldn't know that they weren't right.

Rousing myself, I went to the phone to call the school that I wouldn't be in that day and maybe for the rest of the week. Before I could start to dial the number, the phone rang.

It was George Cannon, and he said, "Bernie, can you come over to the district attorney's office right away?"

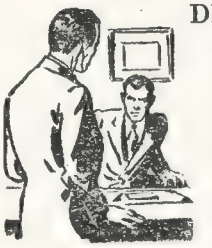
"Did anything new break?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it's not good. The blood in your car has been analyzed." He paused and then added tonelessly, "It's human blood, and it matches Emmett Walker's blood type."

There went the last hope, I thought as I hung up. Police science had proved Dot's story about the dog a lie, and if that was false, everything else she had said was.

I dressed and left the house. The police had my car, so I had to walk to the County Building.

CHAPTER III



DETECTIVE RICARDO and George Cannon were in the district attorney's office. John Fair, the D. A., was one of those back-slapping politicians who never met a voter without heartily pumping his hand, but when I entered his office he merely nodded gravely and remained in his seat.

"The analyses of the bood in your car leaves no doubt of your wife's guilt," Fair began brutally. "It took her some forty minutes to arrive at the bridge game after she left home—a distance of little over a mile. We know now that her delay was not caused by killing a dog and driving out to Dr. Harrison and back. She told the farfetched story about the dog to explain her delay and also the blood in her car. Obviously she met Emmett Walker and killed him with a blunt instrument, probably as he was sitting in the car with her."

"What time was Walker killed?" I asked, grasping at a straw. "I mean, if he died after she arrived at the bridge game—"

Ricardo shook his heavy head. "The medical examiner can't cut it that fine. Says he thinks Walker died between nine and ten-thirty last night, and he'll give or take half an hour at either end."

"What does my wife say?" I asked weakly.

Fair shrugged irritably. "In spite of virtually conclusive evidence, she sticks to her preposterous story about the dog. A very stubborn young woman and extremely foolish." He rose and came around his desk. "Hall, I'm not out for her neck. We have learned that she and Walker were sweethearts at one time. I'm sorry to have to say this to you, but it appears that she continued to be one of his women up until last night."

"No!" I heard myself shout.

"We haven't proved it yet," Fair admitted, "but that explains her motive for killing him. Let us say that she struck him in jealous rage. In that case, I would not insist on a first-degree murder indictment. I want you to talk to her, Hall. I want you to make her see that it will be to her advantage to make a full confession."

"Prison," I said bitterly. "Is that what you offer her, years and years in prison?"

"It's better than the electric chair," Fair said softly and returned to his desk.

George Cannon hadn't said a word since I entered the office. He was our legal mind. I asked him for his opinion.

"Bernie, I'm against any deal," he declared. "I believe I can get her off free."

He believed! I looked at him standing there, seedy and slight and his pinched face with that perpetually hungry expression. He was the top lawyer in East Billford, but it was a small city and his reputation didn't extend beyond it. He didn't think her innocent—nobody did—but he was willing to risk her life to build up his reputation in a sensational murder trial.

"I'll talk to her," I told the district attorney.

Ricardo led me upstairs to a small bare room containing only a few chairs, and left me there. A few minutes later a matron brought Dot in.

There were tired lines about her eyes and mouth, but she looked beautiful. She felt wonderful in my arms and her tremulous mouth was unendurably sweet. The electric chair, I thought dully, or years in prison that would be a living death for her.

After a minute she slipped out of my embrace. "I'd like a cigarette, darling," she said.

I lit it for her, and she sat down and crossed her legs and drew smoke into her lungs. "Darling," she said then, "they're saying terrible things about me."

She sounded indignant. Not frightened, not broken up, but merely outraged that she should be accused of having done anything wrong.

"They're even saying that Emmett was my lover," she went on angrily.

"Was he?"

WHEN the words were out of my mouth, I hated myself for saying them. But I had to know.

Her eyebrows arched. "Darling, you don't think that too?"

"Was he, Dot?"

"Certainly not." Again that vast indignation. "Emmett meant little to me, even when I went out a few times with him before I married you."

I bent over her and took her face between my hands and looked deeply into her blue eyes. They were grave and without deceit.

"Dot," I said, "did you kill him?"

"No."

"How did the blood get in the car?"

"From the dog I ran over."

But police science had proved that a man and not a dog had bled in the car. It didn't make sense that she would tell the truth about everything but that. It was all of one piece. Frantically I wanted to believe her, but deep inside of me I didn't know.

I straightened up. She was my wife and I loved her.

"We'll fight them," I said.

When I returned to the district attorney's office, the same three men were there waiting for me.

"Well, is it a deal?" Fair asked.

"No," I said.

Ricardo sighed. Fair pounded his desk. "Very well, it will be first-degree murder then."

I turned away. George followed me out of the office and put his hand on my shoulder.

"We've got a good chance to lick them," he said. "I don't think, at any rate, that Fair can get a jury to give her the chair. We may get away with temporary insanity if she'll cooperate. I'll tell her exactly what to say on the stand, and if she sticks to it—"

"She's innocent," I said and walked away.

I was running away from his legal logic, but I couldn't run away from my hellish doubts.

Emmett Walker had had an eye for pretty women, but he had married an unattractive one. He hadn't done well as an insurance agent. Financially, being the husband of a woman with a fat bank account had paid off better.

Ida Walker was dumpy, and she had a face to match. When she admitted me into the house, she didn't give the impression of a grieving widow. She was frank about it.

"I'm not a fool," she told me. "I was aware that Emmett was constantly betraying me."

"With Dot?" I asked, looking down at the carpet.

Ida's voice was gentle. "No, Bernie. I never suspected Dot." Then she added, "But a wife is the last to know."

Or a husband, I thought, and the silence that followed was more embarrassing for me than for her. After a minute I asked her what time Emmett had been supposed to call for her last night.

"He wasn't definite," Ida said. "He told me he had work to do at his office and at eight-thirty dropped me off at Marie's in the car. He said he would try to be back before ten to watch a prize fight on the Cannon's television set. At one o'clock I gave up waiting for him and George drove me home."

"Weren't you worried when Emmett didn't show up?"

"Worried?" Ida Walker's lips curled. "Not worried in the way you mean. I assumed that he was with another woman. Then the police got me out of bed and told me he was dead."

I stood up and Ida accompanied me to the door.

"I'm a lot sorrier for Dot than for Emmett," she said. "He deserved what he got. That devil had a way with women. Even I could forgive him a lot. I was willing to accept crumbs from him, but I don't regret that he's gone."

I wondered how much she had forgiven him in the end.

EDITH BAUER was Dot's best friend. She was a high-strung, delicately formed woman whose figure would be a delight in porcelain. When I told her that Dot was being charged with first-degree murder, she burst into tears.

Her husband was there. Herman lived close enough to the high school, where he taught science, to walk home for lunch, and I found them seated at the dinette table.

After Edith dried her eyes, she asked me if I would care to have a bite with them. I shook my head. I'd had no desire that morning for anything but coffee. I sat at the table with them and asked Edith if any of the four women at the bridge game last night had left for any length of time.

"You mean left the house?" she said, frowning at the question.

"At least left the room."

"Not for more than a minute or two," Edith replied. "We four were playing bridge all the time, from about a quarter to nine until almost one o'clock when we broke off. Of course we took time off for a snack, but we were all in the same room."

"Who served refreshments?"

"Marie, naturally, but she didn't have to leave the house to do that."

"How could you start playing at a quarter to nine when Dot didn't arrive until after nine?"

"George Cannon made the fourth," she said. "He wasn't anxious to play, and when Dot arrived he gave up his seat to her and went down to the basement to work with his tools. Cabinet making is his hobby, and he showed us the record cabinet he's building out of bleached oak. It was one of the most attractive—"

She broke off. "How can I talk about furniture at a time like this?" she wailed and started to sniffle.

I turned my attention to Herman, whose chubby face was thoughtful as he chewed his food.

"Where were you last night, Herman?" I asked.

"Home alone, catching up on my reading." He scooped up a slice of tomato from his plate. "Why is that important?"

"Because," I said carefully, "Dot wasn't the only woman at the bridge game who used to go out with Emmett Walker."

"Meaning me," Edith said. "I had quite a crush on Emmett when I was a kid." She rose quickly—too quickly, it seemed to me—to go into the kitchen for the coffeepot.

Herman had his fork poised in mid-air, and he studied me over it. "What are you getting at, Bernie?"

"I'm not sure," I muttered.

And that was the truth. I was groping in the dark, trying to veer guilt away from Dot to somebody else. Anybody else.

I went to see Marie Cannon. Marie was a full-bodied, slow-moving woman who caught and held men's eyes when prettier women were ignored. The housecoat she wore had a tight, high waist and a wide, low neckline that accentuated her lushness. A handkerchief was balled in her fist, and like Edith Bauer she wept at the sight of me, for she too was a close friend of Dot's.

"I can't imagine Dot killing anybody in cold blood," she said. "It must have been an accident, or temporary insanity."

I didn't argue. I had come to ask questions, and my first one was whether Dot had been greatly upset when she had arrived last night.

Marie thought that over. "She seemed somewhat out of breath, but that was all. George played out the hand before he gave up his seat to her, and as she waited she rather calmly told us that she had run over a dog." Marie unclasped her hand to stare at her moist handkerchief. "George is afraid that the fact that she had a story about killing a dog all prepared before she got here will sound bad before a jury."

CHAPTER IV

SOMEBODY came down the stairs. Marie and I turned our heads as George entered the room. He wore a faded bathrobe and flapping slippers.

"I came home for a nap," he explained. "I had only a couple of hours sleep last night when your phone call woke me." He looked at me. "You can use some sleep too, Bernie."

Sleep? Could there be any sleep for me while Dot was shut in by four walls?

"Why would Dot have said she left a dead dog in the spot where she left the body?" I said. "If she'd killed Emmett, she would have known that his body would be found there instead."

George shrugged. "She was aware that Wilcox had seen her come out of the bushes and that when the body was found Wilcox would put two and two together. She was frantic."

"Marie says she didn't seem very frantic when she arrived here a few minutes later."

"No, she didn't," George agreed, "but it's hard to tell with a woman like Dot. She's always breathless and bubbling and excited anyway. And she's—well, Bernie, she's lovely and charming, but her mind jumps about. I mean, that far-fetched story about a dog might have seemed like a valid explanation to her at the time, but she isn't exactly a logical person."

Not at all logical, I thought, and her flightiness used to annoy me. Now it might mean her death or imprisonment. Suddenly I was so tired that I could hardly stand. I leaned against the television cabinet, and I remembered that it was on that screen Emmett Walker had intended to see a prize fight last night. Or so Ida had told me.

I said, "The one who had most reason to kill Emmett Walker was his wife."

Marie sat down abruptly. "Yes," she whispered. "You mean before she got here last night?"

"It's possible," I said. "By the way, where was Emmett's car found?"

"At his house," George replied. "The police believe that he returned home after driving Ida here and then Dot picked him up in her car." He shook his head. "I've considered every angle too, Bernie, but they all lead to Walker's blood in your car and Dot's preposterous story about a dog."

I wasn't being logical either. I looked at Marie, who was opening her handkerchief to blow her nose, and at George, who tightened his lips glumly.

"I'll do my best to save her," George said. "The odds are that she can be got off within the law."

Odds, like gambling odds. Gambling against whether she would die or spend long years in jail or be released with the stigma of blood on her hands.

There was pity in their eyes. Pity for me, as well as for Dot. I could not stand it and I said good-bye and got out of there.

SOMETIMES, when I was worn out from a day of teaching and wanted quiet to read my paper, Dot's incessant and meaningless chatter would irritate me. Now the absence of her voice made the house terribly empty. I had come back home, but I couldn't endure being there without Dot. I was about to leave when the doorbell rang.

A ten-year-old boy stood there—Larry Robbins, son of the druggist who lived in the next block.

"Mr. Hall," he said, "did you see a little black dog?"

I stared at him.

"He got lost," the boy said. "I let him out for a few minutes last night and he never came back. So I'm asking all the neighbors if they saw him. Did you, Mr. Hall?"

With an effort I kept my voice calm. "What did he look like?"

"A little thing about so big. All black except for a white spot over his nose,

and white paws. I got him only last week—my uncle gave him to me—and we didn't get a collar for him yet or a license. Maybe somebody thought he was a stray dog, fed him and took him in."

"What time did you let him out last night?"

"It was after eight o'clock. You didn't see him, did you?"

"Thanks, Larry," I said and patted his head.

He blinked at me. "Thanks for what, Mr. Hall?"

"Never mind," I said, and then added, "No, I didn't see your dog, Larry."

A couple of hours later, the small bulldozer I had hired arrived near the intersection of Pine Road and Wilson Lane. I'd been waiting there for some time. When the bulldozer had trundled off the truck, I told the driver where to start digging. Then I drove to the nearest phone and called Detective Ricardo at police headquarters.

"Can you come right away to where Emmett Walker's body was found last night?" I said.

"You got something, Mr. Hall?"

"I don't know," I said. "But if I have, I want you there as a witness."

I hurried back to where the bulldozer was ploughing up a fifty-feet wide area that started at the bushes along the road. Though he'd dug some three feet deep and twenty feet into the field beyond, he had so far turned up nothing but boulders. I walked beside the bulldozer blade, my feet sinking into the loose, upturned dirt.

The scooped-out area doubled in size before Ricardo showed up. His fat hips waddled as he stumbled over the chewed-up ground. He brooded at the crawling, bucking bulldozer and sighed.

"Faith moves mountains, eh, Mr. Hall?" he commented dryly.

I told him about Larry Robbins' lost dog.

"So why didn't you come to the police and let them do the digging?" he demanded.

"Because there'd be too much red tape before I got them to move, if they moved at all."

Ricardo scratched his jowls reflectively. "This field belongs to Gridley. He wouldn't like what you're doing to it."

"I obtained his permission. I'm paying him and promised to have it leveled off after—"

The driver yelled. He was climbing off the seat. Ricardo and I ran toward him. There, on the ground, half covered by dirt, was a patch of black fur. It was some fifty feet back in an almost straight line from where Walker's body had been found.

Ricardo stooped, brushed dirt away from the fur, pulled the dead animal out into the clear by one of its legs. I had never before seen that little black dog, but I had heard it described by both Dot and Larry Robbins.

Dot hadn't had a logical mind. She had only told the truth. Suddenly I was feeling fine. I had never felt better in my life.

"Do you believe now that my wife ran over a dog?"

Ricardo straightened up and dusted his hands. "Why should I?"

"W-w-why?" I stammered from sheer incredulousness. "Don't you believe what you see?"

"I see a dead dog, all right, but there are at least two things this dog didn't do. He didn't bleed in your car and he didn't leave Walker's body in the bushes. I think I know how the dog got here."

"He was buried by the murderer."

Ricardo smiled thinly. "That's what you'd like us to think. Early this morning, after you left police headquarters, you decided to try to save your wife by making her cockeyed yarn seem true. You found a little black dog and killed it and buried it here. Then you pretended to find it."

The bulldozer driver was listening open-mouthed. As for me, bitter anger had replaced my elation.

"Are you going to have the dog examined?"

"Sure, Mr. Hall, though it probably won't be possible to tell if a car or a club killed it."

THERE was nothing to be said. The finding of the dead dog proved everything to me and nothing to the detective. I told the bulldozer driver to shove back the dirt he had scooped out and walked to my car. The car had been returned to me a few hours ago by the police—with the bloody floor rug missing.

Ricardo moved at my side. "I guess I'd do about the same thing for my wife," he said sympathetically, "but I'd be smarter."

I whirled at the edge of the road to face him. "So you're smart! But not smart enough to see that a story can sound so farfetched that it has to be true. My wife isn't quite the fool all of you try to make her out."

Ricardo had no comment for long moments, and his sad black eyes were reflective. He wasn't a bad guy, I thought. Not one of those bullying, blustering cops. He was trying to do what seemed to him the right thing.

"You know," he mused, looking back at the splotch of black fur on the field, "there's another answer if your wife's story about the dog is true."

"It's about time you saw it."

Suddenly he grinned at me. "You wait here. I have to take the dog's body in. Might be evidence."

He waddled over the chewed-up field. It struck me that I could accomplish more than a policeman could, and by the time he caught up with me I could hand him something. I got into my car and drove off.

Marie Cannon came to the door. Those harsh, stricken lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth had deepened within a few hours.

"George isn't home," she said.

"I'm here to see you," I said.

She led me into the living room. She sat down, keeping her full-fleshed body stiff. I stood over her.

"Marie, you've been weeping all day for Emmett Walker."

She brought the handkerchief to her nose. "Of course I'm sorry he's dead. He was a friend."

"A friend and a lover," I said. "And maybe you're weeping a little for Dot too—or for your own conscience—because you know Dot is innocent. You know that Emmett was alive at around ten o'clock, which means that Dot couldn't have killed him."

I heard a car pull into the driveway at the side of the house. Ricardo, I thought, right at my heels. I hoped that he would have sense enough to let me handle Marie.

"No, no!" Marie was saying.

"We found the dog buried near where Emmett Walker's body was found," I told her. "That proves Dot's story, and it proves that one of the people who was in this house last night killed him. They were the only ones who knew where Dot had left the dead dog."

There was a whisper of feet on the porch. Then silence. That meant that Ricardo was playing along with me. He was letting me break down Marie while he listened through the open window.

Marie was sniffling into her handkerchief.

"This is what must have happened," I went on. "Last night, you went into the kitchen to prepare refreshments. Through the window you saw Emmett Walker arrive to watch the fight on your television. You slipped out through the kitchen door to talk to him."

"I didn't kill him!" she burst out. "Let me alone!"

"You didn't kill him!" I agreed. "None of you four women in the house could have, because none of you was out of the house long enough to drive the body away But there was a fifth person in the house—your husband."

Now, beside the edge of the curtain on one of the two windows looking out on the porch, I could see a man's hip. Ricardo was taking it all in.

"No!" Marie was wailing. "No, no!"

"Yes," I said. "It's the only possible way it could have happened. George was in the basement making a record cabinet. I've been down there a number of times. There's a ground-level window looking out to the side of the house. George saw you run out to meet Emmett. Maybe you kissed Emmett. Maybe you arranged a meeting with him. Then you returned to the kitchen and took the refreshments out to your guests. Emmett lingered outside so as not to enter the house at the same time you did and give his wife ideas. And George came out of the basement through the garage door, and in his hand he held a hammer, or whatever heavy tool he'd snatched up from his work bench."

MARIE wept. In a minute she would be talking for Ricardo to hear.

I glanced toward the window and saw that Ricardo had shifted his position and that considerably more than his hip was now visible.

Only it wasn't Ricardo. The detective had a fat paunch, a padded hip. The man out there was thin, frail. George Cannon, who had seen my car parked in front of his house and had come up on the porch quietly.

All right, let him hear. Maybe he

would break down when Marie did. Or he would flee and that would be as good as a confession.

I turned back to Marie. "So George killed Emmett Walker in blind, jealous fury. Then there he was with a murdered man on his hands. He had heard Dot tell that she had run over a dog and where she had left it. He saw how he could divert suspicion wholly from himself by shoving it all on Dot. He dragged the body into Dot's car, and the battered head bleeding on the floor rug fitted in with his scheme. He drove to where Dot had said she'd left the dog and found it and buried it in the fields behind the bushes and left Emmett's body there. He returned and drove Emmett's car to Emmett's house and walked back. The whole business had taken some time, but you women playing cards didn't know he was gone. Maybe he left one of his machine tools running so that you heard it upstairs and assumed he was in the basement."

"The disgrace!" Marie blubbered. "The scandal!"

And then I saw the gun. Outside the window George Cannon held it in his skinny hand against his hip. Rays from the sinking sun glinted on the barrel.

Breath clogged my throat. There was no chance in flight. Only in more words, and in not letting him realize that I knew he was there.

"So that's why you protected him," I said, "though he murdered the man you loved. You knew that George had killed him. Having seen Emmett alive and outside the house at ten, there was no other possibility. Yet you were ready to see Dot die for George's crime."

Her shoulders heaved. "George said he could get her off. And there would have been a frightful scandal if George had gone on trial. Everybody would have known that Emmett had been my— my—" Her voice went completely to pieces.

I looked at Marie as I spoke, but actually my words were directed to the man outside with the gun. "The police know the truth," I said. "When they found the dog's body, the pieces fell into place. With your evidence, there will be no doubt of his guilt. The police are on their way now to—"

Outside, somebody yelled. The man at the window jerked around, and all of George Cannon's slight body became visible. He held the muzzle of his gun against his temple.

The sound of the shot wasn't very loud. Then he crumpled out of sight below the window sill, and I saw Ricardo running up the porch steps.

I dashed out to the porch. Ricardo was looking down at the dead man.

"Shot himself when he saw me," Ricardo said. "Guess he thought I was coming to arrest him."

"Yes," I muttered. "I made him think so."

He raised angry black eyes to me. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

"Does it matter now?" I said, turning away from George Cannon's body.

Inside the house, Marie was sobbing brokenly.

"I guess not," Ricardo said softly. He went into the house.

I walked as far as the porch steps so that I would not be too near the dead man. In a little while, I thought, I would be bringing Dot home.

And I would buy Larry Robbins another dog.

Coming Next Issue: PORTRAIT OF A KILLER, a Baffling Mystery Novelet by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT—and Many Other Stories!

PAYOFF

By WILL OURSLER

The kid's old man knew just who the killers were!

HE was a sandy-haired kid about eleven, perched on one of the stools at the counter, drinking down a double malted and gabbing with the soda jerker between gulps.

"Sure, they know all about that Baldy Barrett case now," the kid was saying. " 'Course, it was real tough, my old man says, 'cause Baldy Barrett was awful secretive about his private affairs. All the same, my old man knows who them killers are."

The soda man was polishing glasses. He held one up to the light in the dingy drugstore, flecked off a bit of lint from the towel.

"Yeah?" he said. "What's your old man got to do with it, anyway?"

"Plenty!" The kid was boasting. "My dad knows all about criminals and murderers and people like that. He knows more about 'em than anybody."

The two men drinking coffee at the far end of the counter glanced at each other and then over at the kid. The boy didn't notice. He took another gulp of the double malted and looked up. "He's Chief of Detectives, see? My dad's Chief of Detectives for the whole city."

The soda jerker went on polishing glasses. "Yeah," he said in a dry monotone. "And I suppose he lets you in on all the big confidential stuff he don't tell nobody else?"

Missing the sarcasm, the boy nodded solemnly. "My old man and me—we're just like that." He held up two crossed fingers. "We ain't got no secrets—ain't never had any secrets."

The two men at the end of the counter stood up. They left change for the coffee on the counter and sauntered over to where the kid was sitting. The taller of the two said:

"Your old man named Burke? Chief of Detectives Burke? That right, kid?"

The boy looked at them and grinned. "You bet he is. You two men know him?"

The pair seemed a little flustered. The taller one said, "Sure. In a way, sure. We're—we're detectives ourselves, see? Upstate. Just in town for—for a visit."

"Oh." The boy tried to adopt a professional tone. "Working on a case?"

"Yeah, in a way." The taller one frowned. "We're sort of interested in that Baldy Barrett killing. I hear you say something about your old man being close to breaking that one?"

THE boy beamed. "You sure did. My old man's smarter than any crook ever lived."

The smaller of the two leaned forward. "Who they think knocked Baldy off, kid? Good guy, he was. Ran an honest gambling joint. Never bothered nobody."

"My dad figured it out." The boy lowered his voice. "It was some out-of-town guys—members of the same syndicate Baldy was in. They wanted to take over gambling here in the city and he was trying to bluff 'em out, see? My dad says—he says Baldy knew they might kill him."

The men glanced at each other again. The smaller one shook his head and said, "Gang killing. Bad business."

The boy nodded agreement. "My dad says crooks always have a plan for doing things and never get sense enough to change the plan, see? Like the killers this time—they're hiding out right here in town. My dad don't know where but

he knows they'll be leaving town tonight or tomorrow."

The two men looked incredulous. The bigger one said, "He knows all that, huh?"

"Sure. And he knows they got the death gun right in their suitcase. See, they'll try to get it out of town somewhere before they get rid of it, so that it won't ever be traced to them. He says they're sure dumb. He says if they had any sense, they'd—"

The boy stopped. The taller one prodded. "If they had any sense, what does he think they'd do, kid?"

"Get rid of that gun before they leave town. Take it up at night and drop it in the reservoir, maybe. Because they ain't going to get out of town. My Dad and the cops will pick 'em at the station. And they'll have that gun right with 'em. But crooks ain't got brains enough—"

AS they walked up the narrow, backwater streets of the city, heading away from this hole-in-the-wall drugstore, the two men were silent.

Finally the smaller one said, "How did he know—every detail of how we operate? We been working it this way a long time, holing up in the town where we bumped him, keeping the gun with us, until we lam out. Every detail!"

"It don't matter," the other crook said. "It don't matter how he found out, Eddie."

"But what do we do!" The crook called Eddie scowled. "Them cops is waiting for us at the railroad station. At the airport too, you can bet. Sitting there, waiting. And if we try sticking it out here, they'll run us down, sooner or later."

The taller crook suddenly laughed. Eddie's face clouded with annoyance. "What's so funny, Bert?"

"We're in luck, Eddie. We're riding in luck. All we got to do is follow the kindly advice of Chief of Detectives Burke."

Eddie shook his head. "Don't get you. Don't understand."

"He says crooks is too dumb to change their plans. Maybe so, but not us. Because that's what we're going to do—change the routine. We'll get out of this burg tonight on foot, hitch-hiking. And we won't have that gun with us either."

A slow smile of comprehension spread on Eddie's face. "Yeah. Sure, it's smart. Only what do we do with the gun? Where do we get rid of it?"

The lips of the taller man, Bert, twisted. "We get rid of it just like Detective Burke suggested, through the kid, of course. We get rid of it tonight after it's dark—in the reservoir."

It was nearly nine that evening when the two men edged through the darkness toward the rail of the reservoir. The taller of the pair reached into his pocket. The object he drew out glinted in the night.

But he never had the chance to hurl that object into the dark waters of the reservoir. From their concealed places in the shadows, a dozen men in uniform leaped forward. Rasping through the night came the voice of Chief of Detectives Burke:

"Freeze, you two. Not one move out of either of you!"

IT WAS later, after the police sweated the truth out of them, that the two men glared at the Chief of Detectives.

"So the kid spilled it, huh?" the one called Eddie said. "He told you. Or did you put him up to it? Was the whole thing planted?"

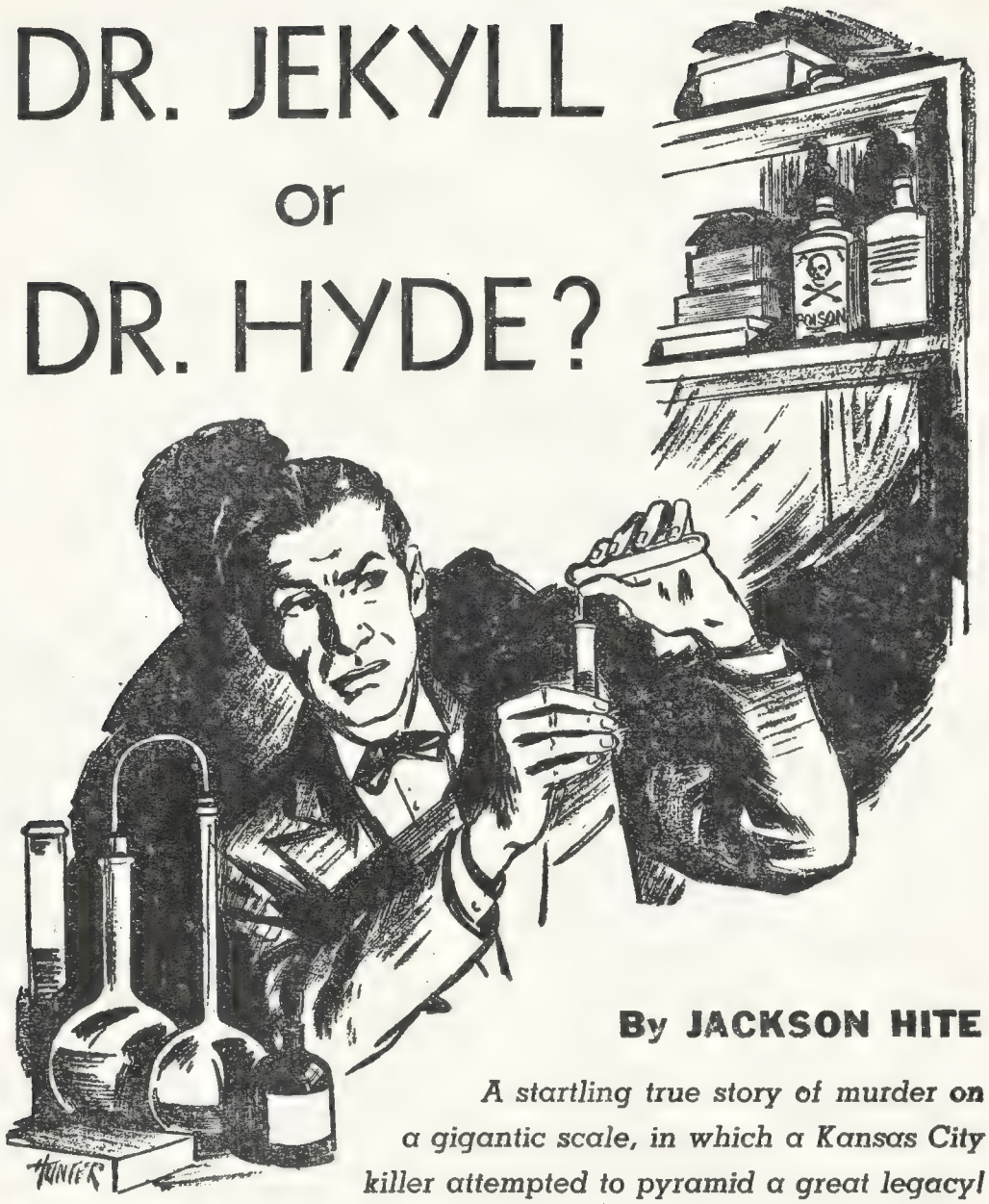
Burke grinned. "Didn't put him up to anything. He just walked in this afternoon, with all the info we needed. Told me how you fellows kept the gun with you, and were holing up for a couple of days right here and how you were just about to pull out, only he was pretty sure sure you'd try dropping the gun in the reservoir first."

"He told you?" Eddie spat out the words. "How'd he know? How'd he know every detail of how we operate? How'd he know we still had the gun?"

"He knew it all." Burke smiled. "Even knew that drugstore was a hangout for you guys. Came in and told us yesterday. We didn't pay much attention. We were sure you fellows had skipped town already."

The two men looked at each other with blank, ashen expressions. Chief of Detectives Burke added quietly. "You see, the kid's dad told him what you two were up to, and just how you'd play the hand. His old man kept his family life pretty secretive—but he didn't keep secrets from the kid. His old man was Baldy Barrett, the guy you two bumped off!"

DR. JEKYLL or DR. HYDE?



By JACKSON HITE

A startling true story of murder on a gigantic scale, in which a Kansas City killer attempted to pyramid a great legacy!

IN the heart of Kansas City, Missouri, is Swope Park, one of the largest city parks in existence anywhere in this country. The beautiful swath of green has another distinction—it is a living memorial to a murder victim in one of the strangest murder cases in this country. When you mix a fortune worth five million dollars with three sudden deaths and a typhoid epidemic that threatened to wipe out most of the heirs to the large fortune, then you have a situation that out-fictions fiction. It makes the Swope case an outstanding crime classic.

The story opens in September, 1909, in the mansion of Col. Thomas H. Swope, 82-year-old multi-millionaire,

and benefactor of Kansas City. He donated the 1,100 acres of city land for the park named after him, as well as paying outright for many playgrounds for children and contributing to all worthwhile charitable causes. Kansas City was founded on what once had been Col. Swope's farm and he made his huge fortune in real estate. His mansion was located in Independence, Missouri, some ten miles from the Kansas City limits.

Living in the huge home with the aged bachelor millionaire were his cousin and close crony, Moss Hunton, whom he had named in his will to be executor and trustee of his estate on his death; Mrs. Logan O. Swope, widow of Col. Swope's brother, and her children, whom Col. Swope loved as if they were his own. These included his namesake, Thomas H. Swope, known as "Young Tom" Chrisman Swope, and four unmarried girls, two of them still minors, Lucy Lee, Margaret, Stella, and Sarah. Lucy Lee was on a European tour as the story opens. Another daughter, Frances, was the wife of Dr. B. Clark Hyde, a well known physcian in Kansas City, and president-elect of the County Medical Society.

In the closing days of September, 1909, Moss Hunton became ill and Dr. Hyde, who was visiting at the house, diagnosed the illness as apoplexy. Dr. D. T. Twyman, the regular family physician, agreed with the diagnosis and the doctors decided to bleed the patient, a remedy no longer used as a cure in such cases. Dr. Twyman wanted to stop after a pint of blood had been taken from the patient but Dr. Hyde insisted that more bleeding was necessary and a total of six pints of the fluid was removed from the veins. The treatment may have been too drastic as Dr. Twyman feared since Hunton became worse after it and died on October 1. A capable registered nurse had been in constant attendance.

Pill Kills Noted Philanthropist

The death of his close friend was a serious blow to Col. Swope who had just recovered from an accidental fall and had resumed his almost daily travels to his office in Kansas City where old-timers could seek him out and touch him for a one-way loan. He weakened visibly and took to bed, while his favorite nurse tried to cheer him up.

Just two days after Hunton's death, Col. Swope had breakfast in bed and later took a digestive pill. Within a quarter of an hour he became ill and had convulsions. A message was sent to Dr. Hyde who rushed to the bedside of the elderly philantrophist and gave him a hypodermic injection. Col. Swope sank into a coma and died that evening, the second sudden and unexpected death in the Swope mansion.

The death of its leading citizen plunged Kansas City into gloom and schools were closed until after his funeral. Newspapers devoted many pages to his activities, but all these were a mere forerunner of what was to come. Col. Swope's will, which was read after his death, divided the main bulk of his fortune among his various nephews and nieces, most of whom resided at the mansion, with a further provision that if any of the main heirs died without children, their share of the fortune was to be divided among the survivors. Each death of an heir would make the shares of the other survivors more valuable.

A Dread Epidemic

On December 2 additional misfortune hit the Swope family. Margaret Swope became ill and Dr. Hyde finally diagnosed her illness as typhoid fever. Later that night the physician returned to find her brother, Chrisman, stricken with the same illness. In the next 48 hours the dread epidemic seemed to have swept through the household. Others down with typhoid included Nora Bell Dickson, a visiting cousin of Mrs. Swope, Stewart Fleming, a nephew who had come up for the funeral, and two of the servants, Leonora Capridge, a maid, and Georgia Compton, a seamstress. The house took on the appearance of a hospital with three private nurses taking care of the sick.

Chrisman Swope died on December 5, three days after he first became ill. The nurses noted that he was seized with convulsions just prior to his death.

The outbreak did not halt. On December 8 Sarah Swope came down with typhoid, and her sister, Stella, joined the list the next day. Miss Mildred Fox, an old family friend who had paid a sym-

pathy call to the house the day after Chrisman's death, became ill at her home. Lucy Lee, who had been cabled the news about her uncle's death, started the long journey from Europe back to Kansas City and arrived in New York while the typhoid epidemic outbreak was on at home. Dr. Hyde went to New York to meet her and escort her back to Independence. Several days after her return she became the tenth typhoid sufferer in the household.

The last episode seems to have been the straw that broke the camel's back. The nurses employed in the mansion had been uneasy for some time at the strange epidemic. They knew that typhoid takes from ten days to two weeks to incubate before it becomes apparent and yet Lucy Lee contracted the disease only a few days after she returned home.

Foul Play Suspected

The nurses informed Mrs. Logan Swope that they suspected foul play. The elderly woman who had just lost her son, her brother-in-law, and her cousin, stared incredulously at the nurses.

"Whom could you suspect of such a thing?" she demanded.

They replied that they were suspicious of Dr. Hyde, Mrs. Swope's son-in-law. They said that they had seen him secretly administer capsules to several of the patients. The pills were not kept in the house and Dr. Hyde had not informed them of the medicine. It was shortly after one of these had been administered to Chrisman that he was seized with the fatal convulsions, similar to those suffered by Col. Swope just before his death.

The nurse who had attended Col. Swope during his final illness added that after Moss Hunton's death, Dr. Hyde had asked her to suggest to Col. Swope that he name Dr. Hyde in his will as executor to replace Hunton. He told the nurse Col. Swope was fond of her and would follow her advice. She indignantly refused, feeling that family matters were not within the scope of her professional duties.

Mrs. Swope decided to consult her old friend and former physician, Dr. Twyman, whom Hyde had ousted suddenly as family doctor by the simple expedient of taking over at the mansion. She also conferred with John G. Paxton, an attorney who had been named administrator of the estate.

While Dr. Twyman had been none too happy at the way his younger colleague had succeeded him as family doctor for the Swopes, he pointed out that Dr. Hyde did possess an excellent reputation among physicians, otherwise he never would have been elected president of the medical society. He further pointed out that while it was strange that no other typhoid cases were in existence in that area, the epidemic might be due to some condition in the Swope mansion. Typhoid at that time was not so rare as it is today, and the fact that Lucy Lee came down with it held no special significance. She could have contracted it on board ship or in New York prior to returning to the Swope home.

Dr. Twyman figured out her typhoid incubation period with pencil and paper and discovered that she could have contracted the disease on the day Dr. Hyde had met her in New York.

The suspicion voiced by the nurses staggered the two men. Not only did it indicate that the people in the Swope mansion had been infected deliberately, but it also meant that one of the wealthiest men in the country had been murdered in a plot that included the murder of his business adviser and most of his heirs. Since Dr. Hyde was not the executor of the estate, the only way the Swope fortune could affect him was the inheritance of his wife, Frances. This meant that the death of every heir, as had already happened with Chrisman, increased his wife's fortune. Five of those still ill with typhoid were important heirs!

"Let's not jump to any conclusions on a matter as serious as this," the two men urged Mrs. Swope. At the same time they decided that it would be best to play it safe and advised Mrs. Swope to notify Dr. Hyde that he was being replaced as family physician by Dr. Twyman.

Mrs. Swope did this without informing Dr. Hyde of the accusations made against him. The handsome, 40-year-old physician, took his dismissal as a reflection on his medical reputation and demanded angrily that he be retained. His wife, Frances, who had moved to the mansion to assist her mother, took her husband's part and declared that if

Dr. Hyde was dismissed, she never would return or speak to her mother again.

Mrs. Swope was caught between two fires—her love for Frances, and her fear that something might happen to her other children. Margaret had just suffered convulsions similar to those that killed her brother. Mrs. Swope stood by her decision and the Hydes marched stormily out of the mansion returning to their own home in Kansas City.

Twyman Questions Patients

Dr. Twyman took over in the house and casually questioned the various patients. None of them had received any treatment or medication from Dr. Hyde before they became ill. Lucy Lee said that Dr. Hyde had met her at the boat and on the train ride back had presented her with a box of chocolates, which both of them ate. She was certain she had not scratched herself while in Dr. Hyde's company and he had not treated her or made an examination of any kind until she became ill.

"The nurses may be wrong after all," Dr. Twyman pointed out to attorney Paxton. "It's difficult to see how he could have infected Lucy Lee."

The physician made a determined effort to trace the source of infection. He summoned Dr. Edward L. Stewart, a Kansas City bacteriologist, to make tests of the water system and the house.

Dr. Stewart took samples of water, particularly from the taps in the kitchen and washrooms. He checked the milk containers, the cows kept on the estate, and the ice box. He also tested the servants who came in contact with the food or served it. All his tests proved negative. The typhoid germs were not coming from a polluted water system or being passed by an unknowing carrier.

In real life the long arm of coincidence sometimes plays a strange role in murder cases. There were several bacteriologists in Kansas City and Dr. Twyman had selected Dr. Stewart without revealing to him the suspicion voiced by the nurses.

Dr. Stewart had in his possession one piece of information that also made him wonder about Dr. Hyde and which he also was keeping secret. It came to his mind because his tests had been negative. He recalled that shortly after the death of Col. Swope, he and Dr. Hyde had lunched together and the conversation quite naturally drifted to a discussion of the effects of different germs. Dr. Hyde said he was interested in doing some research on the subject simply to amplify his knowledge rather than become an expert in the bacteria field. "I'll still send my work to you," he told the other, "but it may help me in making a more rapid diagnosis."

Dr. Stewart replied that he had a number of cultures of different bacteria but as he was temporarily short of culture media he suggested that Dr. Hyde purchase some and he would provide the live germs. Several days later Dr. Hyde brought him test tubes containing the culture media and the bacteriologist gave him live samples of different germs including diptheria, streptococci, and typhoid.

Because of his negative findings at the Swope mansion, Dr. Stewart began to wonder if he had been the unwitting cause of the epidemic. He decided to make his own investigation, keeping his thoughts secret.

He dropped into the office of Dr. Hyde while he knew the other man was out and told the office nurse that he needed to take back some of the culture he had given Dr. Hyde because some of his germs had died. The nurse suggested that he look in the laboratory.

Dr. Stewart found the tube containing the typhoid culture and started. Although the culture had covered the entire surface when he had planted it for Dr. Hyde, the upper half now was bare. Enough germs had been scraped up to cause a city-wide epidemic.

He realized that Dr. Hyde could have used the culture to manufacture a vaccine to combat the epidemic in the Swope household. Since such vaccines were readily obtainable there was no reason for Dr. Hyde to go through the rather complicated and time-consuming process of making his own. A quick check disclosed that Dr. Hyde had obtained manufactured vaccine.

Dr. Stewart Tests Candy

Dr. Stewart had another test to make before taking any further steps. He purchased a box of candy and then experimented with injecting typhoid germs into several of the chocolates. He waited

for several days and then inspected the germs under a microscope. They had not died. Lucy Lee could have been infected by eating a poisoned candy. Since Dr. Hyde would have known which piece he had injected, he could have eaten some of the candy pieces without danger.

The bacteriologist reported his suspicions to the retiring head of the medical society and they decided to consult with Dr. Twyman. For the first time both learned that each had been conducting an investigation.

Dr. Twyman had a further piece of information to add. The day Dr. Hyde had been removed as doctor by Mrs. Swope, he had walked out of the house, ducked around to the side where he stamped his foot in the snow as if grinding some object. One of the nurses had noticed his action and after he left went to the spot and retrieved a smashed capsule, similar in appearance to those they had seen Dr. Hyde administer to some of the patients. The contents were analyzed and contained an unusually large dose of cyanide. Shortly before the epidemic broke out Dr. Hyde had brought his own bottled water to the house and would not drink the regular water in the mansion.

The latest developments were reported to Mrs. Swope and she directed the men to go ahead with their investigation no matter where it led. She employed James A. Reed to take charge of the investigation and become special prosecutor if necessary.

A secret court order was obtained to exhume the bodies of Col. Swope and his nephew, Chrisman Swope. Experts were called in for the autopsy. An alert reporter learned of the exhumation order but not the reason for it but the story became front page news anyway and wild rumors and guesses spread through Kansas City.

Shortly after the papers carried the story, Dr. Hyde hurried to the office of Dr. Stewart. He had some marks on his face and he wanted the bacteriologist to diagnose that he, too, had come down with typhoid. The quick-thinking Dr. Stewart managed to get the other man to allow him to take a sample of his blood. Tests conclusively showed that Dr. Hyde did not have typhoid, a claim he later did make.

The autopsy disclosed that Col. Swope and Chrisman had died of a lethal dose of cyanide and Dr. Hyde was indicted for their murder by poisoning and for killing Moss Hunton by literally bleeding him to death. The full story of the diabolical pot of which he was accused stunned not only the residents of Kansas City but the nation.

Lengthy Litigation

After a bitterly contested court trial, Dr. Hyde was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. His wife, Frances, poured out her share of the Swope fortune in his defense and managed to secure a reversal of the conviction and an order for a new trial. By now more than two years had passed. The second trial ended in a mistrial when one of the jurors went insane. The third trial ended with the jury unable to agree on a verdict.

It was now 1917, eight years later and the lengthy litigation, which the Swope family had been footing, was wiping out the fortune. They decided to let the county prosecute but local officials said they did not have the funds to pay the court fees for the various experts. The defense moved for a dismissal and the motion was granted. Although Dr. Hyde theoretically had been cleared, he was ousted by the medical society and found his practice had evaporated. His wife now believed him guilty and she obtained a divorce and became reconciled with her family. He died several years later while listening to election returns. Police closed their files on the case naming Dr. Hyde as the killer. If he was the killer, he certainly would remind one of Robert Louis Stevenson's famed dual personality—Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!

Three exciting new mystery novelets—WALTZ WITH DEATH by KELLEY ROOS, THE DARK DOORWAY by WYATT BLASSINGAME and PORTRAIT OF A KILLER by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT—plus many other gripping detective stories and features by popular writers next issue!

Beside Carmelly lay a lipstick

DEVIL'S CHERRY

When Detective Nick Bray looks for a lipstick, he finds a murder instead!

O. B. MYERS

I WAS in my shirt sleeves with a drink at my elbow and my feet up on the table, listening to the Sunday afternoon double-header, when the phone rang. I turned the radio down and crossed the room. It was the old man.

"You're going up to Brendale," he told me. "Mr. Vernon—Myles Vernon, publisher of the Brendale *Herald*. His daughter has lost a lipstick."

I thought that I'd misunderstood him, but when I said, "What?" he repeated the last sentence.

"Since when do people pay private detectives to run around after little girls picking up their toys?"

The old man chuckled shortly. "From what I hear, she's quite some little girl. Besides, remember the Arkile case, where you went out to serve a subpoena and ended up with a broken leg, three corpses, and a four-alarm fire?"

"If this is another Arkile case, I'll resign right now."

"I hope not," growled the old man. "I was just trying to convey the idea that sometimes little things grow into big ones."

"You've conveyed it. When do I go?"

"He said to get in touch with him at his home Sunday—that's tomorrow. But if you went out to Brendale tonight, you might scout up a little advance dope on the situation. Know anybody there?"

I said I knew a bartender, and wrote down the telephone number where the old man said he could be reached over the weekend. I threw stuff in a bag, grumbling to myself about the life of an operative—twenty-four hours a day,

seven days a week, and some weeks eight. And not even healthy.

It was ten after six when I parked in front of the Brendale Casino and went in the side door that led to the bar. I clambered onto a high, red-leather stool.

"Hello, Mike," I said.

"Nick Bray!" He used a towel, and then reached across the bar to shake hands, grinning.

"Got any bourbon that isn't made out of shoe polish?" I asked.

HE REACHED behind him without turning his head, set a bottle in front of me, and leaned over to hiss confidentially, "They use this to make shoe polish out of, Nick!"

"Okay. Shine 'em up!"

He poured a double for me and a smaller one for himself. He said, "This is on the house," and we guzzled.

"You come all the way out to Brendale just to sample my bourbon?"

I shook my head once, and asked if he knew Vernon.

"The newspaper guy? Sure. Good egg. Between his daughter and his politics, he has his troubles."

"Start with his daughter," I suggested.

Mike pursed his lips as if to whistle, and rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "Start! I couldn't even get to first base. Though I've heard it claimed that she can be made for a four-bagger."

"Is she old enough to know better?"

"Around twenty. Her mother's dead, and she wraps Daddy around her little finger."

"Who does she wrap around the next finger?"

Mike shrugged. "Whoever's handy. Right now she's engaged to a lad named Ted Carmelly—one of Cutter Kiehl's bowers."

He went over to wait on some customers on the other side of the U-shaped bar. When he came back, he poured another drink, and gave me a brief sketch of Brendale's political set-up.

"Cutter's the boss. But there's a storm brewing over the next primary. A group of citizens who call themselves the Redeal Republicans are trying to ease him out. So Cutter is beginning to apply the pressure where it will do the most good."

"Including the public prints, I suppose?"

Mike made a noncommittal gesture with his shoulders. "I don't think Myles Vernon exactly eats out of Cutter's hand. But Cutter controls everything else—the bank, the lumber company, Ferndon Farm."

When I expressed curiosity about the last, he went over, unlocked the cash register, and from somewhere inside pulled out a small yellow card. He scribbled something on it and gave it to me.

"Eat dinner there. This will get you upstairs afterward, and you'll see the elite of Brendale at play. If you lose your shirt, don't say I didn't warn you."

"My shirt is glued on," I assured him. I put my finger inside the neckband and pretended to tug. "See?"

"Liquor dissolves glue," he grinned. "Have another bourbon?"

A little later, following Mike's directions, I was driving slowly along a side road through the soft dusk. Ferndon Farm, once a country mansion, had been remodeled into a restaurant and night spot, but the exterior effects hadn't been tampered with much. I turned in through a gap in a picket fence onto a narrow graveled drive shaded by heavy shrubbery and bordered by whitewashed stones. Being unfamiliar with the geography, I was rubbering around for the parking area rather than thinking of traffic rules, so I was in the middle of the road when this other car whirled around the curve.

It was a bright red convertible, with the top down, the rear part of the body paneled like a station wagon. It was driven by a girl with a halo of dark hair about her head, angry eyes, and a very pale complexion. Her horn blasted musically.

I got over as fast as I could, but not fast enough to suit her. She cut to her right, gravel spattered, and a wheel mounted one of the whitewashed stones, making the convertible jounce awkwardly. As she passed me, almost within inches, she said something that shouldn't be said to a dog. All that registered on me at the moment was the fact that her lips were exactly the same shade of red as the body of the car.

I had an elegant dinner, discreetly served by a soft-footed waiter in one of several small, intimately-boothed dining rooms. The check was elegant, too—$8.50. I made a note of the amount so as not to cheat myself on the old man's swindlesheet.

It was nearly eleven when I mounted the thickly carpeted stair. At the top, a pudgy man in a tuxedo half-smiled suavely in a brightly lighted foyer. Two sides were cut off by closed doors. The third was a big arched window with a dozen diamond-shaped panes, only the panes were mirrors.

There was nothing to indicate whether one or more of those panes was, or was not, made of that two-way glass—from one side a mirror, from the other as transparent as any window.

THE stout man took my yellow card and held it for a moment, scarcely glancing at it, his smile never changing by a hair.

I could see no signal given or received, but then he murmured, "I hope you enjoy yourself, sir," and the door in front of me clicked open.

There were three large rooms on the second floor, all opening into each other through wide, arched doorways. Roulette, chuck-a-luck, crap, and poker all offered the guest a chance to win—or lose—a fortune, or any part of it. The crowd was small, but well-dressed and prosperous looking. There would probably be a bigger crowd later.

I got myself a highball at the bar and strolled over to the crap table, which seemed to be getting most of the action at the moment. I estimated that the old man would stand for fifty on the expense account, so when the dice got around to me I tried twenty. After two passes I crapped out and started over again. I rolled a big seven, let it ride while I made an eighter from Decatur, and then dragged just before I failed to make a five, which put me ten bucks to the good.

I ignored offers of side bets, paying more attention to the faces and conversation about me. On my second attempt, I lost my bet, and the dice, the third time I threw them out on the table. The next time I rolled twenty-five up to a hundred, and let it lay. The house man gave me a fresh pair of cubes. After I had rolled box-cars twice in succession, I passed the dice and went over to get a new drink.

I was leaning against a satinwood pilaster in a doorway when a short, sleek man in a boiled shirt murmured in my ear.

"Would you like to see Mr. Van Horn, sir?"

I knew what that meant. I had been seen to lose. Perhaps I was out of cash. By naming a few references, I could doubtless persuade the manager to honor a small check. If the names were right, the check could even be a large one.

I shook my head. I was in Brendale to collect information, not to give it out.

"No, thanks," I said. "Guess I'll call it a night." I emptied my glass, set it on a black marble mantel, and walked out.

The next day, about one, I phoned Vernon's home.

"Oh, yes! From the Tri-State Agency? You have a car? I suggest that you come out here to the house about six. I'm having a number of guests for dinner—all people who are interested in this situation. Ted Carmeily, and Van, and Cutter Kiehl, as well as Channing Welford and Tom Oakes. Tom is our police chief, you know. Welford is an assistant district attorney."

"If you've got all that law in on this already, Mr. Vernon, what do you need a private dick for?"

"Mr. Welford is the one who found the lipstick."

"Oh, it's been found, has it? Then what—"

"I'll explain it to you when you get here. It's at the end of Ralliman Road. Anyone will direct you."

I found Ralliman Road easily enough. It wound uphill for a mile or more, ending at a pair of brick gateposts on the highest point of the ridge. The rambling stone-and-shingle house, a hundred yards farther on a knoll, must have had the finest view in the county. I followed the curving drive between wide, well-manicured lawns to a graveled area in front of the four-car garage where several other cars were parked.

A white-coated Negro had my bag out of my hand before I was halfway to the front door. The door stood open, and Myles Vernon stood in it, waiting for me.

Though not yet out of his forties, he had hair that was pure white, and it enhanced the aristocratic cast of his high brow and chiseled features. He smiled easily, but without quite hiding the worried look behind his dark gray eyes.

"Come in, Mr.—Bray, isn't it? I'm glad you're early. There'll be time to go in my study before the others—"

HE BROKE off, to follow the direction of my glance. Perhaps I should say my gaping stare. A girl, descending the broad staircase on the far side of the spacious hall, paused on the last step. She was something to gape at. Her strapless black gown was molded to her luscious curves like a coat of velvet paint. Her black hair was a sleek and shining cap, until it tumbled over her bare shoulders to make startling contrast with the pallor of her smooth skin. Her dark eyes were wide, and doubtless made to appear wider by the artful use of mascara at the corners. Art had achieved its triumph with her lips. Their full curves, a rich exotic scarlet, made me think of a tropical flower opening eagerly to the hot caress of a jungle sun.

They also made me think of that bright red Chrysler convertible.

"Ah, yes." Vernon coughed. "My daughter—Lee. Mr. Nicholas Bray, from New York."

She not only took my hand, she kept it. "From New York! How exciting!" Her husky voice laid the accent in such a way as to make it sound as if New York were a dream city on the far side of the world, instead of a mere twenty miles to the south. Her eyes mocked me.

"A city slicker," I told her. "Watch out for me."

Vernon began, "Mr. Bray and I have something to discuss in—"

"Nonsense!" she interrupted. "Before he has a cocktail? Daddy, where are your manners?"

The way she said Daddy made me think of someone reprimanding a pet pooch. She kept hold of my fingers, drawing me toward the two steps that led down into the huge, sunken living room. Vernon followed us with an unhappy shrug.

"That's Ted Carmelly by the fireplace," she told me. "Don't mind him. He'll loosen up after he gets a little drunk."

Ted Carmelly was a broad-shouldered young man with a deep tan and a sullen expression on his handsome face. We nodded at each other.

A gigantic silver shaker, dewed with moisture, stood amid a cluster of glasses on a mahogany refectory table. I poured out a couple of daiquiris. She held hers up in front of her face and looked at me tauntingly over the rim.

"To us!"

While I sipped, she emptied her glass and held it out again.

"You like to punish this stuff, do you?" I asked.

"It's the first today," she retorted. Her voice was brittle.

Two men came in through French doors from a terrace. Vernon introduced me. Welford, the attorney, was plump and sleek, with long, nervous fingers and thinning brown hair. A typical family man, he typically could not quite keep the leer out of his look when it rested on Lee. Tom Oakes, the copper, was in civilian clothes, and quite boyish with his curly blond hair and freckled skin. He kept from leering by the simple expedient of not looking at Lee except when she spoke directly at him.

Everybody drank cocktails. I, my second. Lee, her third. It only seemed to make her eyes brighter. She started calling me Nick. I called her Lee. She talked rapidly, about nothing.

At some time during the next fifteen minutes two more guests arrived separately. Political boss Cutter Kiehl made an entrance, with flourishes. He had a paunch, a big, jovial face, and a hearty manner, and he called everyone by his first name. Everyone except me. He repeated my name in full when Vernon introduced us, and I could see his small eyes, behind their surface smile, weighing me with the nicety of a chemist's balance.

The other man, by contrast, glided in almost unnoticed. He was slender and dark, perfectly poised, and his face was handsome in the same way that a highly polished hatchet could be said to be attractive. When Vernon brought him over, he smiled thinly.

"Ah, yes!" he murmured. "I have seen Mr. Bray before."

"You have the advantage of me," I replied. And then, remembering the mirrors in the second-floor foyer of Ferndon Farm, I realized that I spoke the literal truth.

"How was the golf today, Van?" Lee asked.

"Very bad, my dear. Very bad." The gambler picked up a cocktail and moved off toward the divan where Cutter Kiehl was sitting.

My eyes followed him. Lee resumed her remarks about some summer theatre in Westport. I waited until she got to the end of a sentence.

"How long has Van Horn been in Brendale?" I asked her.

SHE SET down her glass. Without changing expression she swung her hand from behind her hip, slapping my face as hard as she could. Then she crossed to the fireplace, slid an arm around Tec Carmelly's neck, and murmured something in his ear. He blushed.

I recognized the tactic, and was amused. Nobody moved, but everyone started talking at once to fill up the embarrassing pause. Myles Vernon took advantage of this babble to draw me over into the farthest corner of the room.

"A week ago, Tony Padanza shot himself," he told me. "Tony owned a grocery here in Brendale, and ran a horse parlor on a small scale in the back room. He had been playing at Ferndon Farm that evening, and lost some money. Not much—a few hundred dollars. He asked Van for a loan. It was refused. For his own good, Van says. Tony was upset and angry when he drove off. Half an hour later the police got an anonymous phone call. They found Tony in his car, half a mile away, a bullet through his head, the gun still in his hand."

I nodded. "Van Horn had too many of his I.O.U.'s already?"

"Van says he has none of Tony's I.O.U.'s, at all. It happened that Attorney Channing Welford was in Police Headquarters when that call came in. He went with Tom Oakes to the scene, and nosed around—luckily for me! On the floor of Tony's car he picked up one of Lee's lipsticks."

I asked a question by looking blank.

"She has them made for her, personally," Myles Vernon explained. "It's a shade called *Devil's Cherry*, made up specially to match her temperament—so they tell her. Can't be bought by anyone else. They come in a distinctive, five-sided tube of white gold—nothing like it in the stores. But perhaps you can get her to show you one."

I touched my cheek with my fingertips. "Perhaps I can—later. Rather an expensive habit, aren't they?"

"Forty-two dollars apiece, plus tax. I pay for them. But it isn't the cost. It's the embarrassment and notoriety that would kill my standing here. Lee was not with Tony. Says she has never seen him in her life, but you can imagine what the city papers would do with a morsel like that, if they were to get hold of it."

I raised my brows. "They haven't got hold of it?"

He shook his head. "Welford saw the danger, and put the lipstick in his pocket without saying anything. Later, he transferred it to his desk. But the next morning it was gone. Stolen."

"Who else knew he had it?"

"At that time, only Tom Oakes, the police chief, who was with Welford when he found it. For several days nothing happened. Then Cutter Kiehl began getting anonymous phone calls, demanding a thousand dollars. To protect me—Cutter and I are very close, you know, in many ways—he paid, as directed. Against my wishes, had I known."

I played naive. "And the lipstick was returned?"

"No. Instead, Cutter got another demand yesterday, for two thousand, on threat of producing the lipstick and the whole story of where it was found."

Vernon's lip twisted. There was a desperate flicker in his eye. He was being whipsawed. If he permitted the story to break, he and his daughter would be right in the middle of a smelly scandal. If he let Cutter Kiehl go on paying for silence, he was putting himself in the power of the political boss. The Brendale *Herald* would shortly print what Cutter told him to print, and nothing else. The police chief, the attorney, Van Horn the gambler, young Carmelly—they were all tangled up together in politics and business. They all had motives. Any one of them could benefit by a hold on the local publisher.

"Tom Oakes," I told him, "wasn't the only one who knew that Welford had that lipstick. If Lee is telling the truth about not knowing Tony, someone must have planted it in Tony's car. When it didn't turn up publicly, that someone could guess easily enough what had happened to it. That someone is who we're looking for."

There was anguish and doubt in Myles Vernon's reply. "Yes—if Lee is telling the truth."

"And why shouldn't I tell the truth?" I hadn't noticed Lee cross the room to refill her glass. "Why don't we all tell the truth for a change?" She turned toward the others, flourishing the cocktail. "Tell Nick all about me. Tell him what a

trollop I am. Tell him how I foul up all your grand schemes by refusing to play the stooge. Tell him how I say yes when it should be no, and no when you want me to say yes. Tell him I've got no brain —only a body."

HER sultry glare held them in silence. Then her eyes slid into the corners. "Nick is going to find my lipstick. We all know why he's here. Why shouldn't we talk about it? Why not help him?"

Her father mumbled something about showing me one.

"Show him a *Devil's Cherry?*" One corner of her mouth twitched up in a reckless half-smile. "Why, yes, I'll show him."

She put down her glass and came across the rug. I guessed what was coming and grabbed her. She circled both arms around my neck and kissed me full on the lips. It was like kissing a perfumed flame. I both smelled and tasted warm, ripe cherries.

When I lifted my head, I saw Ted Carmelly, pouring himself another drink, slop half a glass of liquor on the table.

Lee's insolent gesture, whatever else it did, captured the center of the stage for her. She held it during dinner, and she still held it after we drifted into the study to a game of ten-twenty-thirty stud poker. She steered the conversation relentlessly onto the subject of the missing *Devil's Cherry*, and its implications, in spite of the embarrassed disapproval of her father and the other guests, who plainly would have preferred discussion of it in private.

I hardly asked a question. Lee needled each one into telling every angle of his connection with the affair, and then boldly pried into their possible motives. Somewhat to Cutter Kiehl's discomfort, she insisted that he describe the complicated directions he had received over the phone for paying the hush money.

"Could you make a guess at the identity of the voice?" I asked.

He shook his big head. "I didn't waste time asking him who he was. But I did ask how I could get in touch with him, in case of a hitch. He gave me a telephone number."

"He did? What was it?"

Kiehl's eyes glittered. "It was Columbus eight, four-two-two-four."

I clenched my teeth and said nothing. That was the office number of my own Tri-State Detective Agency.

The poker game was a farce. The stakes were not big enough to interest anyone used to the scale of Ferndon Farm, and the tension in the room was inimical to any sort of concentration. They played like men waiting for a time bomb to explode. The cards were all running one way. Lee, with the luck of the beautiful and the damned, was accumulating all the chips.

Somewhere around eleven a servant came in and announced, "A telephone call for Mr. Van Horn."

The gambler faced his hand down. "Deal me out," he said, and left the room. He didn't come back.

In quick succession Lee took two pots away from Ted Carmelly, cleaning him out of chips. He groaned and stood up. "You've busted me. Want to take a swim, Lee?"

She didn't even look up at him. "Not while my luck is as hot as this. Deal the cards, Daddy."

We heard Carmelly in the hall, tinkling things while he made himself a highball. Then he must have gone upstairs.

Lee's luck changed. She tried to force it by extravagant betting, but it didn't work. Her pile shrank, and as soon as she was no longer winning, the game lost its attraction for her. She took a small pot, then lost a big one, and pushed back her chair. With a murmured, "Excuse me," she left the study.

Ten minutes later she spoke from the doorway. "I'm taking a dip in the pool. Any volunteer life guards?"

She had changed into a two-piece bathing suit and tight-fitting red rubber cap. The suit was a cream-colored rayon so close a match for her skin that you had to look twice to see that she had anything on. We looked three times.

I was dealing. I shook my head. None of the others were swimmers except Tom Oakes. He gave a start, as if someone had kicked him under the table, and sank back in his chair.

Lee pursed her lips in a pout at me, and then disappeared toward the rear of the hall. A minute later we could see through the study window that the floodlights at the foot of the garden, where the pool was, had been switched on. I had jacks back to back, and bet fifty cents. Everybody stayed.

WELFORD had just finished dealing when we heard Lee's voice through the open window.

"Nick! Bring me a drink, somebody!"

I went out in the hall, picked up the bottle of Scotch and two glasses, and found the door that led out to the terrace. At the foot of a short, hedge-bordered path, Lee was waiting for me against the soft glare of the concealed floodlights. I set the glasses on a stone bench at the side of the pool and poured liquor in them.

"I didn't bring any soda."

"Never mind, darling. Just a minute—"

She finished fixing her lips and put her tools back in a tiny red bag which she dropped on the end of the bench.

"What's the matter?" I grinned. "Does it come off in the water?"

She gave me a sidelong glance as she picked up a glass and emptied it neatly. "No. I just wanted them to be perfect, before you kissed me."

She didn't have to twist my arm. She had just come out of the pool. I could feel the moisture soaking through the front of my shirt, and my slacks. If this had any cooling effect on her, it was only on the surface. I tasted the rich flavor of sweet, ripe cherries.

She acted as if we were all alone in a closet, but it occured to me that the lights surrounding the pool must set us up in a perfect silhouette from the house.

"Ted is going to like this," I mumbled the next time she stopped for breath.

"He should know better than to peek. Kiss me again like that."

After a while I unlocked her hands from behind my neck. My voice sounded thick.

"You'd better go in the water and cool off."

I had to give her a push. She went in with a splash, but came up laughing, and climbed out onto the springboard. While I sat on the bench, sipping Scotch, she treated me to an exhibition of plain and fancy diving. She knew her stuff, too, and what she lacked in professional technique she more than made up with the natural grace of her lithe figure.

After some time she climbed out, panting, and sat down next to me. She took the glass out of my hand, finished what was in it, and tossed it nonchalantly over her shoulder. It shattered on the tiled border of the pool.

"Had enough?" I asked.

"Enough Scotch and water—yes."

Her dripping arms slid around my neck. She was even wetter now, but no cooler. The *Devil's Cherry* had not come off in the pool. She drew my head down, swaying far back on the bench.

That was my position when I heard the shot.

I felt her stiffen in my arms. I blinked. The cobwebs cleared out of my brain. I jumped up. Lee slumped limply on the bench.

She mumbled something like, "Oh, my God—why did he do it *here!*"

I looked up toward the house, saw the shadow of a man's figure move across a lighted window, upstairs. I sprinted.

The bedroom door was locked, and no key was in the keyhole. Pounding on the door brought no response. It took Myles Vernon several minutes to remember where duplicate keys were kept, and to send a servant after them. Half a dozen of us burst into the door together when it opened.

Ted Carmelly sat slumped forward across a table. In his right temple, where the bullet had entered, was only a small, round hole surrounded by powder specks. Where the bullet had come out, on the other side, it had carried a great chunk of his skull with it. The gun, a short .38 automatic, was still in his hand.

On the table lay a lipstick in a five-sided tube of gold. It had been used to scrawl a note on a sheet of plain white paper. I leaned over to read without touching it.

Lee: I'm through. First I thought you loved me. Then I thought I could make you behave, one way or another. I see that neither is possible. Keep your *Devil's Cherry* for a man who is able to handle it—I can't. Ted.

I leaned lower, and sniffed. I caught the aroma of cherries.

"Here's the key," said Van Horn, straightening up from behind an armchair. "He must have locked the door on the inside, and then thrown the key on the floor."

"How about letting the police uncover their own conclusions?" I barked at him.

He gave me a glassy stare, then shrugged and tossed the key back on the floor. "It's quite obvious, isn't it?"

POLICE CHIEF TOM OAKES gave a demonstration of efficiency that surprised me. He got busy on the telephone, after giving orders that no one was to leave the grounds. Within fifteen minutes he had half a dozen coppers there, the coroner, photographers, and fingerprint experts.

"You'd think he had a murder to solve," grumbled Channing Welford, "instead of an open and shut case of suicide. Well, now at least we know who had Lee's missing lipstick."

"Do we?" My smile was blank, and I said nothing about my remarks, in the upstairs hall, to young Oakes.

"Does that read like a suicide note to you?" I had asked the young police chief. "You notice it says nothing at all about killing himself. It might have been written by a young fellow calling off his engagement to a vicious wench—an engagement dictated originally less by love than by political and business reasons suggested by his boss. A young fellow who, when he wrote it, had no idea he was going to die."

The young chief stared. "You mean —he was murdered?"

"Listen. When I started to run toward the house from the pool, I saw a moving silhouette in that room. That was *after* I heard the shot. Now a man who has just blown his brains out all over the rug doesn't get up and move around, afterward."

"But the door was locked, and the key inside!" he protested.

"It was—when we found it. When we first rushed into that room, we all looked first at the body, and the note. Giving the murderer a good chance to drop the key unobserved behind that armchair."

So Oakes had the murder theory in his mind when he questioned us, standing around the littered table down in the study. Lee and I accounted for each other's presence at the pool. The two servants alibied each other by having been together in the kitchen. Van Horn admitted to being alone in his room on the second floor. Welford had also been alone. In the library, he said, admiring some first editions. Everyone agreed that he had been the first to reach Ted Carmelly's locked door, but the library was right at the foot of the stairs.

Myles Vernon had a partial alibi. He had gone down to the rumpus room in the cellar to get a book he had left there, and had come up by the back stairs to the pantry. The servants had seen him. Cutter Kiehl had been in the study, with Oakes himself, watching Lee's diving through the window—and doubtless watching her other antics as well.

This placed everyone far from Carmelly's room at the moment of the shot, except gambler Van Horn and Attorney Welford, with Myles Vernon himself as a long shot possibility. The young chief seemed stumped.

"You're taking for granted," I told him, "that the lipstick used to sign that note is the one found in Tony Padanza's car, and that later disappeared from the assistant district attorney's desk—if it did disappear. I don't see much reason for believing that. Why don't you search our guests—their persons as well as their luggage and rooms—and see what you find?"

This brought loud rumbles of protest —loudest from Cutter Kiehl and Attorney Welford. But Tom Oakes knew a tip when he saw one, and he knew that he had the authority. He told them to strip to their shorts.

Lee asked, "This doesn't include me, does it?" She had donned a beach robe over her wet suit, but was shivering.

"Of course not, my dear," said her father. "You'd better go up and change, before you catch cold."

Chief Oakes sent three of his men to comb the guests' rooms and bags, while he handled their persons himself. He started with Van Horn, the gambler, and did a thorough job, right to the skin. He found nothing. Van Horn dressed and left the room while Tom was going through Vernon's pockets.

The final result of that search was as surprising as it was significant. Practically everyone in Brendale, it appeared, was in possession of one of Lee's lipsticks.

Her father had one in a drawer of his chiffonier. He couldn't remember, he said, when or how it came there. A cop found one in the briefcase of Cutter Kiehl had left in the entrance hall. The political boss hemmed and hawed—just a little token of appreciation from the young lady, he explained, when he had quashed a charge of driving while intoxicated, some weeks before. Attorney Channing Welford carried his in an inside vest pocket, next to his heart. He got very red, and stammered almost un-

intelligibly about a tête-à-tête dinner in Greenwich Village.

"It looks," I grinned, "as if the young lady had been very generous with her sentimental favors. Just to complete the record, here's mine." I tossed to the table with the others the sample of *Devil's Cherry* that I had filched from Lee bag, by the pool.

"*Now* do you get it?" I asked Oakes.

He shook his head.

I PUT flame to a cigarette. "The only one of us who does not have a lipstick is the one who put his in Ted Carmelly's hand, to write that note with. He then shot the unsuspecting lad through the head, pressed the gun into his hand, locked the door from the outside, and waited in the adjoining room while we rushed up the stairs."

Tom stepped to the door and spoke briefly to one of his men.

"But the lipstick—" stammered Myles Vernon. "The one that was picked up in Tony Padanza's car—"

"Who cares? With all of these floating around, there's no sting in that threat any more. Whether somebody stole it from Welford's desk, whether Welford pocketed it himself and demanded payments from Cutter Kiehl, or whether Cutter has just been inventing the anonymous phone calls, I don't know, and it makes no difference now anyway. I rather favor the last. Political bigwig Cutter saw a neat way of using the situation to put Vernon under obligation to him, and that business of the Columbus telephone number was just a blind to keep me from getting too big for my pants."

Attorney Channing Welford, brick-red from the collar up, was opening and shutting his mouth like a fish. Cutter Kiehl bellowed incoherently and waved his plump arms. Myles Vernon silenced him.

"But Ted Carmelly—why was he killed?" demanded Vernon.

"I've hardly been in this house a quarter of a day, Mr. Vernon," I told him. "I was brought up here to find a lipstick, and I've found you a handful of them. I haven't had time to set up a complete legal case yet, but I'll give your police chief my guesses, and he can dig up the proofs later."

I addresesd myself to young Police Chief Tom Oakes. "From what I've seen of Ferndon Farm, it's a place where the customers lose their money. A man couldn't play there regularly, and stay ahead. Tony Padanza had played there often. It's my guess that gambler Van Horn held enough of Tony's I.O.U.'s to ruin him. When Tony lost again, last week, and came in to ask for further credit, Van Horn not only refused him, but told him if he didn't pay up he'd break him and run him out of town. Tony threatened to commit suicide, and Van followed him to see if he meant it. Tony was really desperate—he shot himself."

"I'll examine the contents of Van Horn's safe," Oakes said.

"He may have destroyed the I.O.U.'s by now. With Tony dead, they are worthless as a claim against the estate. But Van Horn saw a way to forward another ambition. He planted the lipstick, so he knew that Attorney Welford had found it, and was keeping quiet. Maybe he blackmailed Kiehl, disguising his voice, maybe not. I don't know. At any rate, it wasn't money Van Horn was interested in. It was the opportunity to put Myles Vernon under inexorable pressure."

"But what did he want from me?" asked Vernon.

I faced him. "Your daughter. Everyone else in this crowd has always played Lee for fair game. They wanted to make her, but not to marry her. Van Horn wanted to marry her. But he was the one man—a gambler—that you would never permit her to marry, unless under threat of a serious scandal. Or unless you were indebted to him for saving you from a serious scandal. Lee, hounded by wolves, sick of being used as a bait or a prize, egged him on, chiefly by provoking his jealousy. It's a method she's good at. I doubt if she knew the extent of his plans. She probably thought Ted Carmelly was to be pressured into breaking the engagement, no more. I'll bet she still has no idea Carmelly was murdered."

Myles Vernon passed a hand across his brow. "My daughter—Lee—in love with Van Horn! I can't believe it!"

I pointed at the window. "Look."

DOWN by the pool the floodlights were still on, throwing up a soft amber curtain against the night. Silhouetted against this curtain a couple

of figures standing on the terrace were plainly visible. They stood pressed so closely together that they looked like one. It was impossible not to recognize Lee's mass of dark hair, her eager, upturned profile. The man's was a little vague.

Just then a cop—the one Oakes had spoken to, earlier—stepped from behind a bush and tapped the man on the shoulder. He lifted his head slowly, reluctantly. Then he made a sudden movement.

There was a quick scuffle. Van Horn must have foreseen the search, hidden an extra gun somewhere in the house, and picked it up again after dressing. But the cop was too quick for him. Van Horn was frog-marched off toward the kitchen door.

A minute later Lee burst into the study. Her eyes were blazing, her cheeks flushed with excitement and anger.

"They've arrested him!" she cried. "What for?"

"For murder," I told her bluntly.

"Nick!" She crossed the room, her housecoat flying open, and threw her arms around my neck. Her tone softened. "Nick, you'll help me save him, won't you? Won't you, Nick?"

I could feel her body trembling. I got hold of her wrists, but had to tug hard to disengage them.

"Your *Devil's Cherry* got him into this, but I am not—thank Heaven—in love with you."

She slapped me savagely. I laughed, kissed her once, and reached for my hat.

I don't think I'll ever forget her. No, I don't think I will.

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The World Does Change!

ONE of the penalties of crime is imprisonment. The other, and almost as severe, is returning to find one's world very much altered. For Enrico Giudici, released at 74 after 54 years in an Italian prison, the shock was almost too much.

Back in the early 1890's Enrico, then but a youth, had been one of a notorious gang of bandits who had terrorized the Milan countryside with their raids on farm houses and tiny villages. In 1894 four of the group were caught. Enrico was one. Because of his youth and other extenuating circumstances he was sentenced to life imprisonment instead of death. The extreme penalty was exacted of the others, who were held more directly responsible for killings that had accompanied some of the raids.

Last year Enrico was pardoned. The Italian state felt that he had more than adequately paid for his crime. For 54 years he performed hard labor on the tiny prison island of Procida. Enrico, without a friend or relative in the world, returned to Milan to make a fresh start at 74.

His first realization was that there were no horses or carts about. He had loved horses as a youth. Love of horses had in part been the reason the boy Enrico had joined the bandits. His next awareness was of the modern motor cars. They were everywhere, rushing at one from all sides as though bent on destruction of the community.

"What are these monsters?" asked Enrico. "There are so many of them. Is there no escaping from them? Is this the world or some special portion of purgatory for criminals?"

In his 54 years on Procida, Enrico had occasionally caught sight of official visitors and was aware that men's clothes had somewhat altered since his time. He was unprepared though for the exposed legs and shoulders of the young women of modern Italy.

"Indecent!" he exclaimed. "These must be evil women. Now I am sure I am in a criminal's purgatory."

Told that these were the newest fashions with the long skirts, that only short months before the ladies had been exposing their knees, he refused to believe his informants.

—*Simpson M. Ritter*

Blackmail in Three Acts

By
TOM PARSONS

Playwright Cort Blackston gets tangled up in his own plot!

Foster Hunt drew out a revolver

THE office of Foster Hunt was a place of quiet, elegance and luxury. The furnishings and drapes were expensive and in good taste, the rugs were soft and thick. It hardly seemed the place to contemplate murder. Yet as he sat at his desk, the thought of killing Cort Blackston was uppermost in Hunt's mind.

"Now that I've finished reading it, how do you like the play?" Blackston asked. "Of course it is pretty rough as it stands now, but with a little more work on it I think it will be a smash."

Blackston picked up his highball glass and took a sip of the producer's excellent scotch. The playwright was young and dark with a suaveness about him that was like a hard sheen. He sat at one end of the leather covered divan with the manuscript of the play he had just finished reading lying on the floor at his feet.

"If that play is ever produced it will ruin me," Foster Hunt said. "It is the distorted story of my life told in three acts." He sat wearily back in his chair. He was a well-dressed middle-aged man who wore rimless glasses and whose hair was thinning. "Where did you get the facts, Blackston?"

"That's not important," Blackston said. "The vital thing is how much is it worth to you for me to make no further attempt to get the play produced? Even if you refuse to handle it, there are other producers who might be interested, you know."

"Blackmail, eh?"

"Call it that, if you want to put it so crudely." Blackston took another sip of his drink. "Of course I used another name, but your friends and your enemies will probably recognize you, Mr. Hunt. I don't like this any better than you do. Shall we say fifty thousand?"

Cort Blackston sat staring at the floor. Foster Hunt reached silently into the left hand top drawer of his desk and drew out a revolver. He had made up his mind. He was going to kill Blackston and destroy the play. He got to his feet, the gun in his right hand.

"You'd be foolish to try it," Blackston said as he reached down to pick up the script. "A friend of mine is holding a carbon copy of the play. He knows exactly what to do if anything should happen to me. I told him I was coming to see you this afternoon."

HUNT sank slowly back into his chair. He returned the gun to the drawer and closed it. Blackston watched him and then smiled.

"That's a relief," the playwright said. "For a moment I thought you were go-

ing to do something foolish with that gun."

"I changed my mind." Hunt's tone was calm, his face impassive, and the eyes that stared at the other man through the rimless glasses were hard. "You are still going to die, Blackston. In my estimation, blackmailers are the lowest form of animal life and I see no reason why they shouldn't be wiped out."

"You're hardly in a position to sneer," Blackston said. "As a boy you served a term in a reformatory for stealing. You later were suspected of murder, but finally released because of lack of sufficient evidence. You were mixed up with racketeers during the Prohibition days. Then you changed your name and went into the theatrical business."

"True," said Hunt. "And you have all of the highlights of my hidden past in your play. But as I just said a moment ago, you are still going to die. But it will apparently be an accident, and you won't know exactly when it will happen."

"I told you my friend knows exactly what to do if anything should happen to me," Blackston said, and for the first time he sounded nervous. "Don't forget that."

"You made it quite clear. But if you should be hit by a taxi or fall in front of a subway train, I hardly think anyone could or would blame me." Hunt's smile was not at all pleasant. "Under the circumstances, I feel that to give you fifty thousand dollars would be a waste of money. You won't be around to spend it, Blackston."

"Then I'd better try and find another producer for my play." Blackston put the script into a big yellow envelope. "The accident buildup is good, but I don't scare easily."

The phone at the side of Hunt's desk rang and the producer answered it. "Steve Jackson," he said over the wire. "Good—have him come in." Then Hunt put down the phone, he looked at Blackston. "Stick around for a few moments. I'd like you to meet Steve Jackson."

Blackston looked surprised but before he could ask any questions the door of the private office opened. The man who entered was over six feet tall, weighed close to three hundred pounds and had a face like a gorilla.

"Hi, Fos," he said in a deep booming voice. "Long time no see."

"It has been a long time, Steve." Foster Hunt rose and shook hands with the big man. "This is Cort Blackston—he writes plays."

"Yeah." The big man looked at the playwright. "Well, every guy to his own racket I always say. Some people will do anything to make a living."

"If I told you someone was trying to blackmail me, what would you do, Steve?" Hunt asked.

"Show me the lug," roared Jackson. "I'll crush him to death with my bare hands!"

"I'll be going now," Blackston said quickly. "If you change your mind about the play, you know where to reach me, Mr. Hunt."

"Yes." Foster Hunt nodded. "Fortunately I have your address." The way he said it sounded ominous. "I'm glad of that."

"Don't run away angry," said Jackson. "I knew a feller who wrote books once, and we got along all right."

BLACKSTON just nodded as he picked up his hat and hurried out of the office, the play in the yellow envelope under his arm. His interview with Foster Hunt hadn't turned out as he expected, and he felt so uneasy that he hardly noticed the producer's extremely pretty secretary as he left.

The elevator that took him down from the forty-fifth floor of the big office building just seemed to drop and he felt a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach. He wondered if the cable had broken, but the other passengers and the operator did not seem at all perturbed. Blackston breathed a sigh of relief when the car stopped at the street floor and the door slid open.

Blackston's one thought was to get back to the apartment he shared with Warren Carroll and tell Carroll what had happened at Foster Hunt's office. After all, the whole thing was Carroll's idea. He had supplied the facts about the producer's past and talked Blackston into writing the play. Carroll had refused to even tell Blackston where he had learned so much about Foster Hunt's background.

"Never mind about that part of it," Carroll had said. "The important thing is to read the play to Hunt. When he learns what it is about I'm sure he will

be willing to pay fifty thousand to make sure the play is never produced. That means twenty-five grand for me and twenty-five for you, Cort."

Blackston had been tempted. He had written other plays, but the one that had been produced two years ago had been a flop. He didn't like the blackmail angle —but he needed money badly.

CORT BLACKSTON had met Warren Carroll through friends, and had liked the man even though Carroll was at least twenty years older than he was—a quiet individual who said little about his past. They had finally decided to share an apartment together and had been lucky enough to find a place six months ago.

Blackston was thinking deeply as he left the big office building and started across Sixth Avenue. He leaped back as a taxi just missed hitting him.

"Look where you're going, you dumb cluck," the taxi driver shouted. "You want to get killed?"

Blackston shuddered as he stood on the curb. Foster Hunt had told him he was going to be killed in an accident and he had just come close to it.

The apartment he shared with Carroll was down in Greenwich Village. He had intended to walk over to Seventh Avenue and take an I. R. T. train downtown, but now he hesitated, remembering what Hunt had said about his falling in front of a subway train.

He found he was strangely frightened. He stepped into a cafe and had several drinks. Still the shadow of death seemed to be constantly hovering over him. He was sure now that he had been a fool to try and blackmail Foster Hunt or even to write the play in the first place.

Hunt had been friendly to him. The producer had been willing to make an appointment with him and let him read the play instead of just following the usual procedure by asking him to leave the script. The producer could have looked it over when he got around to it.

It dawned on Blackston that if he had devoted the time he spent on the blackmail script on a good play that Hunt had liked and would produce, the chances were that he would have made far more out of the deal in the long run.

He took a taxi down to the Village. Warren Carroll was waiting when he stepped into the apartment.

The older man looked worried.

"Cort!" Carroll exclaimed. "Why did you come here? Don't you know this is the first place they'll look for you?"

"Who?" demanded Blackston. "What are you talking about, Warren?"

"You don't need to pretend with me," Carroll said. "I just got the news flash over the radio!"

"Oh, yes, I meant to tell you," Blackston began.

"Never mind that," interrupted Carroll. "The important thing is that you murdered Foster Hunt and you've got to get away before the police arrive."

"I did what?" Blackston sank weakly into a chair.

"You killed Hunt," said Carroll. "I told you I just got the news flash over the radio. Of course they didn't mention your name, but they said the police are looking for a playwright who was with the producer shortly before Hunt's secretary found him dead in his private office—a bullet in his brain. Why did you do it, Cort?"

"But I didn't kill him," Blackston said slowly. "Foster Hunt was alive when I left his office. The man who murdered him is much smarter than I am, I realize that now."

"You may be telling the truth," Carroll said. "But I doubt that the police will believe it. According to the news flash the playwright was the last person to see Hunt alive."

Blackston got to his feet. The apartment was on the second floor of the building and the windows of the living room faced out onto the street. Blackston went to the nearest window and stared out.

"Jackson!" he muttered as he saw the big man with the face of a gorilla staring at the building. "Of course. I forgot about him."

"What are you talking about?" asked Carroll. "Who is Jackson?"

"He could be responsible for the climax of the third act," Blackston said cryptically. "I hope so."

BLACKSTON moved closer to the window. Steve Jackson looked and saw him there. Blackston waved and the big man nodded and headed for the entrance of the apartment building. The playwright turned from the window and looked at Carroll.

"They say anything about the weapon

that was used to kill Hunt?" he asked.

"It was the gun that Hunt keeps in the left-hand top drawer of his desk," Carroll said. The doorbell rang. "Who is that?"

"Jackson—I hope."

Blackston went to the hall door and opened it. The big man stood there smiling at him. "Hi, pal," Jackson said. "Our friend Hunt gets some of the craziest ideas. He told me to trail you after you left his office. Might have missed you if I hadn't seen you standing in the street in front of the office building. From then on following you was easy."

"Foster Hunt is dead, Jackson," Blackston said. "He was murdered in his office after we left there."

"No!" said Jackson. "Who told you?"

"The killer." Blackston stared at Carroll. "You got the news flash over our radio here, Warren?"

"Naturally," Carroll said impatiently. "I haven't been out of the apartment all day. Didn't feel very well. As you know I seldom listen to the radio but I just happened to switch it on a little before the news flash."

"I meant to tell you about the radio," Blackston said. "A couple of the tubes are burned out. It doesn't work." He looked at Jackson. "I heard you tell Hunt what you would do to the man who was blackmailing him—what would you do to his murderer?"

"Just show me the guy," snarled Jackson. "Where is he?"

"Right there." Blackston nodded toward Warren Carroll. "Grab him, Steve."

WARREN CARROLL made a dash for the door. Jackson grabbed him and held him in a grip of steel. Blackston heard a squeaking of brakes and looked out of the window. Two police patrol cars had stopped in front of the building. Carroll had been right in saying that the police would come looking for Cort Blackston.

"The police are here," Blackston said calmly. "You must have waited until Hunt's secretary stepped out of the office and then walked in and shot him, Carroll. You even knew the murder weapon was his own gun. Getting me to write the play about him so I could try to blackmail him was smart. It made me the main suspect when he was murdered."

"I'd like to strangle this guy," Jackson said bitterly. "I recognize him now. He's the double-crossing rat that made so much trouble for Fos back in the days when Hunt was in the liquor business. This lug went by the name of Joe Arnold. I was driving a truck for Fos in those days. This lug even stole all of Hunt's private papers. You know we even found out just lately it was this guy who committed that murder Fos nearly served time for some years ago."

"So that's it," Blackston said. "I was trying to learn your motive, Carroll. Some way you must have learned that Hunt had discovered you committed that murder years ago. You decided to get rid of him and I was to be the fall guy with the blackmail play."

The doorbell rang. It was the police and Blackston let them in. A few twists of the wrists by the big man who held him and Warren Carroll was confessing everything. He tried to implicate Blackston by telling about the blackmail angle.

"Aw, he's just talkin'," said Jackson. "I was at Hunt's office when Blackston left. That should clear things up."

"We'll need you as witnesses," the officer in charge said as they took Warren Carroll away. "We'll get in touch with you, but don't try to leave town."

"My pal," said Blackston when the police had gone and he found himself alone with Steve Jackson. "You sure saved my life."

"I knew it," said Jackson. "Now I gotta have a playwright for a friend. I know the craziest people!"

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CALLING ALL MYSTERY FANS!

Three Top-Flight Detective Novels—CANCELLED IN RED by HUGH PENTECOST, THE STRAW MEN MURDERS by ALEXANDER CAMPBELL and COURT OF SHADOWS by DANA CHAMBERS—all in the gala Fall issue of our companion magazine TRIPLE DETECTIVE—now on sale, twenty-five cents at all stands!

DINNER with the BENDERS

or Ptomaine Was Never Like This

A strange but true story of gruesome murder at a tavern in Kansas back in the 1870s

by LEO MARR

DEATH by violence in the old Wild West was usually uncomplicated enough. You called out your enemy and dared him to go for his six-shooter. A citizens' committee brought in a verdict that the deceased had died of slowing up of the reflexes. And that was that.

This forthright tradition, to be sure, was occasionally broken by a cautious soul who deemed it safer to plug a man in the back than to take chances in facing him. But apart from this man-

to-man business, there was also, alas, plain old nasty murder. This was, as always, practised by those who regarded it as a business, not a hobby, and who preferred to take no chances at all. . . .

In the fall of 1870, there settled in Labette County, Kansas, a family named Bender. There were four members of this congenial little domestic circle. John Bender, père, was a lean, dark man of medium height, clean-shaven, who spoke only the most broken pieces of English in a thick German accent. He was about sixty years of age. His wife, a decade his junior, was stocky and stolid, with blue eyes and brown hair. If she spoke at all, her words have unfortunately not been preserved for posterity. Son John Bender was about twenty-seven. He was slim and not tall, wore a fluffy moustache and spoke English more fluently, though still with a German accent. But it was the girl, Kate, who was the spark-plug of the outfit.

Whether she was beautiful or not is a matter of some disagreement. There are accounts which liken her to a horse, and others which swoon over her in terms that might have flattered Helen of Troy. However, an official description by Governor Osborn of Kansas described her as twenty-four years of age, with "dark hair and eyes, good-looking, well formed, rather bold in appearance, fluent talker, speaks English with very little German accent."

Girl Fascinates Men

Whether she was beautiful or horsy, in that woman-starved frontier community she was a magnet to men. Moreover she had two accomplishments much in demand, she danced and rode a horse, both well. Consequently she never lacked for mooning swains, nor for the dates of the period, which were dances, buggy rides, church socials and "meetin's."

But Kate had a more remarkable talent. She was a medium. She held seances and lectured on spiritualism. In those pre-suffrage days, her lectures, and her boldness in traveling about to deliver them, caused sensational excitement. A sample advertisement from a local paper gives the tone:

Professor Miss Kate Bender can heal disease, cure blindness, fits and deafness. Residence, 14 miles east of Independence, on the road to Osage Mission. June 18, 1872.

It was in the spring of 1871 that the Benders moved into this house on the road to Osage Mission. They had it built for them, a frame house on the road from Cherryvale to Parsons. Travelers bound for Independence from the Osage Mission and Fort Scott used this road too, so that it was an important travel artery.

For a while there was peace on the prairies of Kansas and the Bender family blended into the life of the region. The turbulent days were fading, the Indian fighters had moved west and the inhabitants were peaceful farmers. They were, however, men who had fought in their time; in the great War between the States and in the civil war that tore Kansas apart. And the horse and rifle were still part of their lives and traditions, though there was decreasing use of them as old.

This was lovely country; rolling prairie, high, bright with sunlight, tangy with the scent of growing things. The Bender house snuggled in a hollow near the bank of Drum Creek and was attractively framed by cottonwood trees and thickets of wild plums.

The house was no palace. It had, in fact, only one room, but this was divided by a heavy canvas curtain so as to form two rooms. In these meagre quarters the four not only lived, but set up a tavern for the nourishment of man and beast who were caught without shelter on the highway.

For the thrifty Benders had observed the heavy flow of traffic on the highway and seen an opportunity to turn an honest dollar. Dinner could be had, served by the spiritualistic Kate. And for those too weary to travel further and who had no objections to a bit of doubling up, sleeping accommodations could be managed somehow. Their horses were given space in a stable back of the house, beyond which were a vegetable garden and an orchard.

So passed the year of 1871 and part of '72. No one paid any particular attention as to whether business prospered or languished at the Bender tavern. Professor Miss Kate frequently took herself off to deliver her lectures, or to cure blindness, fits and deafness in the afflicted of the prairie country.

Her brother John, too, was one to do a great deal of traveling, on business of his own. And the old man, as always,

went his surly way and offered no information to anyone.

About such a family it was inevitable that stories and rumors should arise. Kate's activities, popular as she was with the men, were bound to cause talk. But there was nothing definite about these rumors, nothing that could be pinned down. Until the spring of 1873.

In March of that year, Dr. William York, came to visit his brother Col. A. M. York at Fort Scott. His visit ended, he saddled his horse and left Fort Scott, on March the 9th, to ride to his home in Independence. Dr. York was a prosperous man; in addition to a fine horse and good saddle, he carried an expensive watch and a considerable sum of money.

His first night out of Fort Scott was spent at Osage Mission and his presence there completely verified. He rode out of the Mission on the morning of the 10th. Around noon he met friends on the road near the Bender tavern and, in talking to them, mentioned that he intended to stop there for his midday meal.

Dr. York never arrived home in Independence. A few days later, when the alarm got back to Colonel York at Fort Scott, the Colonel began to track his brother's progress westward. He traced him to the Mission and then to the point on the road where he had met friends. From there on no human had ever seen Dr. York again.

Going clear through to Independence, Col. York heard some strange talk of travelers on the road.

"We were eating with the Benders," this man told him. "I can't describe it to you, but suddenly we got the queerest feeling that we were in danger. You know how you can almost smell it sometimes? It was something about those people—the way they looked. I can tell you we cut that dinner short. We got out of the house and Luke here went for the horse and carriage while I covered him with my revolver. We didn't see nothing, mind, but we sure were glad enough to get away from there. And we heard something that sounded mighty like shots as we drove off. It was hard to tell, the horse was pounding along so, but I believe those rascals took a shot or two at us."

Mighty little to go upon, but it was enough to inflame the Colonel's imagination. Moreover, there was the fact that his brother's tracks ended in thin air just about at the Bender place, where he had told friends he was going to stop.

Colonel York organized an informal posse of twelve men from the region to back him up in paying a call on the Benders. On April 24th, they rode up and hailed the house.

Young John Bender was sitting by the side of the road with a Bible in his hand, reading. Old Mrs. Bender came to the door and demanded, in her broken English, to know why they were disturbing the peace of a law-abiding family.

"I am looking for my brother," Colonel York explained. "His name is York—Dr. William H. York—and the last word I have of him is that he was stopping here for dinner. I can find no trace of him beyond this house."

John Parries Questions

Young John had arisen and come over to the group. "York?" he said. "Yes, I think there was a Dr. York here for dinner. You served him, didn't you Kate? And he left after that."

"He left? You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. He left."

"He never arrived home."

"I am not surprised," John muttered. "There are outlaws in this country who would kill a man for a silver dollar. I have often been shot at here along Drum Creek. Your brother must have been killed by outlaws."

Colonel York blanched and shook his head; he did not like this theory. One of the posse who had been eying Kate, spoke up.

"Miss Kate, you're in touch with the spirits, how about asking them where the Colonel's brother is?"

"I should like to," Kate replied, "but it is impossible. There are too many unbelievers present and I could get no help from the spirits. Colonel York, you must come alone and we shall try. Come in a week—five days—and we shall hold a seance."

Benders and posse meanwhile ranged up and down the creek, beat the brush and even dragged the creek bed, but no trace of Dr. York was found. The dejected posse then took their departure.

Colonel York did not keep his appointment for a seance with Kate Bender. His suspicions as alive as ever, he spent more than a week raising another posse

and on the eleventh day, May 5th, he returned to the Bender tavern in force. Only to find that events had preceded him.

The day before, two farmers of the region, the Toles brothers, passed the Bender house about eight in the morning. All was quiet there except for the frantic bleating of a calf out back. There was such distress in the animal's cries that the brothers investigated. They found the calf locked in a pen, nearly starved, while its distracted mother paced about outside, unable to reach him.

The Toles let the calf out to join its mother and then, aghast at such unfarmerlike neglect, knocked on the Benders' door to see if there were trouble or illness within. There was no answer and in a few minutes they determined that the house was empty and deserted. The birds, to coin a classic phrase, had flown.

As closely as could be reconstructed, it was fixed that the Benders had left, hurriedly and with only their most portable possessions, on the night of April 29th, which was the night of Colonel York's proposed seance. Miss Kate had stood him up.

By May 5th, when Colonel York's new posse arrived, the search was already underway. Suspicions heightened by the Benders' flight, the neighbors had gathered, had broken down the door and were going over the house with the well-known fine-tooth comb. Clothing was strewn about, household utensils hastily abandoned and much paper and books devoted to Professor Miss Kate's profession of lecturer and medium.

Searchers Find Trapdoor

A trapdoor was found in the back room and below this a cellar. More remarkable, a tunnel led from the cellar, passed under the barn and emerged near the orchard. On the earthen floor of this cellar were dark blotches which looked disturbingly like blood.

All this was highly suggestive, but not conclusive. Standing in the open, Colonel York was gazing around when some slanting of the light gave him sudden perspective.

"Boys," he said, "There are graves in that orchard. I can see them!"

Some of the men laughed. "Stop it, Colonel," one said. "You're giving me the shivers. You've got graves on the brain."

"Maybe I have," said the Colonel, stalking toward the orchard. "But see here." He pointed to a depression in the ground, long and narrow. "See where the rain has settled this excavation. There's been digging here. And here's another—look—and another."

Everybody looked and presently some of the others thought they could see it too. This was ground that old Bender had kept well cultivated and there was always much plowing and harrowing and digging.

Colonel York prevailed. Shovels were brought and the men started to dig. The first hollow produced results. Five feet down they came upon the naked corpse of a man. They brought it up and wiped away the dirt and Colonel York was looking at his brother again.

With that, knowledge cold and deadly settled upon them and everyone began to dig with whatever implement they could lay hands upon. The whole orchard was probed, sounded and torn up. And eleven bodies were brought to light.

Nine were men, one a young woman and one a child—a little girl. She was under the body of her father and since there were no marks of violence at all upon her, the inference was plain enough that she had been tossed into her grave alive and had been suffocated by her father's body and the weight of earth.

All the others had been killed by a powerful blow on the head, which had crushed the skull. All but two of the bodies were eventually identified. Several of the men were known to have been carrying rather large sums of money.

The sight of the corpses, and particularly of the little girl who had been buried alive, roused the usual blind desire for revenge in the mob. Somebody had to pay for this. And unfortunately, there was somebody right at hand.

A German by the name of Rudolph Brockmann, who was right there in the group, helping and digging, was the perfect victim. He was a neighbor of the Benders, he was a German. What more did they need?

"What do you know about this, Brockmann?"

"I? I know? I know nothing. It is horrible!"

"Get a rope!" someone shouted. "Hang the bloody killer!"

In a moment a rope hissed through the air and dropped around Brockmann's neck. The other end went up over a limb and the frightened, struggling man was instantly dragged off his feet and hauled aloft to kick and choke and flail the air with arms and legs.

Mob Tortures Victim

Then he was dropped to the ground with a crash and while he gasped and retched, the fierce questions were hammered at him.

"What'd you have to do with this?"

"Where did the Benders go?"

"You were in it with them. Admit it or we'll string you up again!"

Gasping, sick, terrified, Brockmann protested his innocence. He was hauled up again, to choke and struggle, then dropped and exhorted to confess.

But meanwhile the cooler heads had been beating against the mob's blood lust and by a miracle, prevailed. The sight of the terrified man's struggles and strangling took some of the edge off the mob's anger and they let their victim be taken away. Brockmann was released to go home.

Attention was now turned to the house and a little examination showed how the Benders' murder machine was worked. A table was set up in one room close to the canvas curtain. The guest was seated with his back to the curtain, so close that he actually touched it. To a person on the other side, the outline of his body was actually indicated by the bulge in the canvas.

Thus, while the innocent traveler ate and perchance chatted with the fascinating Miss Kate, it takes no great amount of imagination to picture old John Bender, or perhaps Young John, waiting behind the curtain with ax or sledge, waiting for that moment when the guest might lean back and the outline of his head show clearly through.

Then, a vicious swing of the heavy weapon, the solid crunching impact and the sprawling fall of a limp body. At once the dead or unconscious victim was dragged under the curtain, stripped and robbed. The guest was then dragged to the trapdoor, his throat cut and dumped into the cellar. That night he would be taken through the tunnel to the orchard and buried. The plowing and harrowing were for the purpose of so leveling the ground that the graves would not be noticeable. It was only Colonel York's keen eye that saw through this cover.

With four or five days start, the Benders vanished into the great open spaces of the prairies. Posses took off from Independence and other towns and searched in all directions. And the results of the search can be boiled down to these several conflicting beliefs:

1. The Benders got clean away and were never heard of again.
2. They were overtaken in Oklahoma and all hanged. Colonel Triplett, who was present at the search in the Bender house, ran across this version. In telling it, in later years, he discounts it.
3. The Benders were overtaken by Vigilantes from Cherryvale and shot to death. Their wagon, riddled with bullets was found abandoned on the road. There were people alive in 1910 who would not talk, but were present at the killing of the Benders.
4. The Benders were members of an inter-state gang of horse thieves, whom they supplied with horses from their victims and who in return helped them escape.
5. The Benders successfully made the railroad at Thayer and got aboard a train which took them south to Texas, where they covered their tracks completely.

Those who hold that the Benders were caught have much solid opinion on their side. They point to the fact that most of these posses were led by skilled trackers, ex-Indian fighters and Army officers. These men could follow the flight of a hawk through the sky. And they also point out that many of these men would simply not talk about the Benders again, no matter how much they were questioned. They advance this as proof that a lynching was done and the posse had agreed in self-protection to keep their mouths shut.

On the other hand there is this to say. The Benders had a good long start. The reward of $500 was never claimed. People kept getting arrested for years by mistake for the Benders.

Whatever did happen to the Benders may never be known. But should you ever be traveling through the country and stop by chance at a little wayside tavern where you are set before a canvas curtain for your dinner—

Don't eat. Get out of there. Get a bag of peanuts or a candy bar or tighten your belt. For sometimes it's better to be hungry. After all, nobody knows where the Benders are!

Buzzard's Wings

"You know, Lieutenant, a buzzard isn't like a hawk"

Detective Donovan sets a trap for the clever killer whose victim obligingly bought his own coffin — and climbed in!

I WAS eating breakfast when the telephone call came. The waiter in the cafe across the street from Police Headquarters plugged in the phone.

"It's for you, Lieutenant Donovan," he said. "Maybe there's been a murder."

He spoke in the tone of a man who knew there hadn't been a murder in town in three months. His tone carried the hopeful note of a man who thought the stock market might be getting a little better.

"Thanks, Joe," I said.

Doc Kummer, assistant coroner, was on the other end of the wire. "It looks like suicide, Tim," he said, "but it can always be murder. You know that casket factory down near the waterfront? Well,

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

a man came in a week or ten days ago, and ordered a box tailored to fit. A special job. Latest design."

"Do designs change in coffins?" I asked.

"The trade likes the word, 'casket' much better, Tim," Doc replied. "And casket designs *do* change. This fellow ordered a special job. This morning when they opened up the shop there he was, ready for the pall bearers. They're pretty excited down there, naturally. They haven't touched a thing."

"What's the deceased's name?"

"Crowder. Judson Crowder."

"Geez," I said softly. "I'll be right down."

I didn't finish breakfast, but paid the check, hopped into a Detective Bureau car and pulled up in front of the factory fifteen minutes later. The employes, thirty-odd, were crowded into the office, and they were a pop-eyed lot. The manager, who introduced himself as McCoy, took me into the factory's display room.

"So it's Crowder," I said. "I knew him well."

The lights had been turned on. It was lighter than daylight, it seemed. The lights had been distributed so there were no shadows. I don't know whether shadows in a casket display room have a depressing effect or not. If so, the factory had taken care of everything.

"How did Mr. Crowder get into the building?" I asked.

"It must have been through the front door, because the alley door was barred and locked," McCoy replied.

"Do you have a night watchman?"

"Well, no," he answered. And the inference was that people didn't go around stealing caskets.

IF Crowder had come in the front door, I figured what his probable route had been. From the front door you entered the wood shop. Normally saws would have been humming, cutting the cedar boards into the desired shapes. The air would have been full of cedar sawdust. A fine coating covered everything, and the strong smell of freshly-cut cedar was good. The shells were cut and made here, then taken into the next room where girls did the finishing—the tufted satin interiors, and the familiar outer covering. After which the handles were screwed in place.

The finished product was shifted to the shipping room, or into the display room. Because the Crowder casket had been a custom built job, it had been placed in the display room. I've no doubt that pride in craftsmanship was involved, and McCoy probably expected the casket would be in the display room for several weeks at least.

"Do you remember the details of this particular deal?" I asked McCoy.

"Everything is very clear, because it was my first experience in dealing with a man who wanted his casket made to order," McCoy replied. "He must have guessed I was surprised, because he volunteered a few details. He said that he had always made it a point to prepare for the exigencies of life whenever possible. And that when he could anticipate a situation, he tried to prepare for it. Quite by chance Crowder had learned that the city had a thriving casket business."

"People just don't bother to wonder about some lines of endeavor," I said.

But this foresight was in keeping with Crowder's character. He had told me on several occasions his foresight was responsible for his half-million dollar fortune. And with pardonable pride he had added, "I cheated no man, paid my income tax in full, and came by my money by anticipating, then manufacturing, items people needed."

He was forever parking his car overtime. When he had a dozen parking tickets he would come down to the traffic bureau and pay up. He wanted to pay ahead, anticipating there would be overtime parking tickets in the days to come, but the bureau explained that would be licensing illegal parking, and he had said, "So it would! So it would."

On such occasions he would drop into my office and pass the time of day. I sensed that since his wife had died ten years ago, he had been a very lonely man. He lived in a large house surrounded by well-kept grounds. Somewhere he had found the moving picture version of the English butler, whom he called Primm. Primm was undoubtedly a phony, and was having the time of his life carrying out his role. Besides, the job paid well. In turn, Crowder was aware of the deception and enjoyed it. Primm gave his guests laughs, and the guests gave Primm laughs.

Crowder ate lunch and dinner at his club, except when he was entertaining,

then they were invited to his home where a Mrs. O'Leary worked miracles in the kitchen. Mr. O'Leary looked after the gardening, giving a mother's care to roses or riding over the long stretches of lawn on a power mower. The O'Learys lived in a cottage on the place.

Crowder's only relative was a nephew, forty-seven — twenty years Crowder's junior. He was a frequent visitor at the Crowder home, dropping in and out as he pleased, often remaining over night. He was a bachelor who maintained an apartment downtown and operated a small business. It gave him a fine income with little effort.

All this had come to me in stray bits picked up here and there. You know how it is with a detective—the filing cabinet in his brain is picking up and classifying items, even seemingly unimportant ones, at all times.

Crowder, and his nephew, Turk, were cut from the same pattern—big, heavy-featured men, with thick, broad shoulders and powerful arms. But Turk lacked his uncle's natural warmth, and his love of his fellows.

I suppose Crowder had an enemy or two, so many men do, but I'd heard of none who would go so far as to do away with him. From what McCoy told me, Crowder and Turk had dropped in.

"My uncle," Turk had said, "wishes, for some strange reason, to have a casket built to order."

"You know, Turk," Crowder had said, "I believe in anticipating and preparing for life's exigencies."

"But this is carrying it too far," Turk had said. "You've owned a burial lot for twenty years, and that's proper. But this casket business—well, it gives me the willies."

NEVERTHELESS, Turk had followed McCoy and his uncle through the workshop, where Crowder had paused at length to watch the sawing of the various parts, and had nodded approvingly at the perfection of the joints as the shells took form. The upholstering, too, had intrigued him. But when they reached the display room Turk had enough.

"I can't take any more," he had said. "But once you get your neck bowed, Uncle Jud, there's no stopping you. So I'll wait in the office."

Perhaps, I reasoned, Turk Crowder couldn't take a roomful of caskets, but I was more inclined to think it was the luscious wench in the office, a Miss Patterson, who served as receptionist, bookkeeper and stenographer.

I had a few minutes with Miss Patterson before Doc Kummer arrived. From Turk Crowder she had learned that his uncle was a man of sudden impulses. This custom-built casket was an example. A casket-factory receptionist doesn't have the varied opportunities for dates given the average girl. Of necessity she would meet only coffin drummers and morticians—noble fellows, all—but a romantic girl would hardly look for her knight in shining armor among them.

She had been flattered when Turk Crowder had tried to date her, but perhaps she had remembered something her mother had told her about strange men, for she had declined.

Doc Kummer and an assistant arrived at the factory just then. The driver parked the dead wagon in the alley, and a cop chased the crowd away.

"Shall we start in, Doc?" I asked.

"Go ahead," he said.

McCoy lifted the lid and Doc said, "Well, Tim, he came in under his own power. Cedar sawdust on the bottoms of his shoes."

I could see that at a glance. Some of the sawdust was even left on the satin at the foot of the casket. I also saw a little green pill bottle that had worked its way under the dead man's ribs until it was barely visible. I handed it to Doc.

"I'll check with the druggist," Doc said. "On the face of it, he climbed into the casket, downed the pills and composed himself as in death, hands folded across his chest."

"But no lily in the hands," I said.

"Which is surprising, because I'm told he was a very thorough man," Doc said. "I suppose we had better load the casket into the wagon and do the rest of the job at the morgue, unless you want things untouched awhile longer."

"I've completed this part of the investigation," I answered.

"Suicide, of course," he said.

"Right now, I'll buy murder, Doc," I answered, "but I won't buy suicide—yet. That's just between us."

"Naturally you want to talk with the butler and nephew," he dryly observed. "The butler is always under suspicion, and a hell of a lot of the time he's

guilty." Doc was a constant reader of detective stories.

"This is one time, the butler isn't guilty, or even under suspicion," I said.

I went out to Turk Crowder's apartment building. There was a tenant's garage in the basement with an attendant in charge.

"Has Mr. Crowder come down yet?" I asked.

The attendant apparently assumed I had an appointment with Turk and he answered, "Not yet."

"Well," I said, "I might as well sit in his car and read the paper until he shows up."

He waved me to Turk's car, and I read the paper for a while. But when the attendant was elsewhere, I went to work, checking on the car. Then I said something more about Turk being delayed and took the elevator to his apartment.

A FILIPINO house boy admitted me, and I sat down and sniffed. There was a faint, elusive odor of expensive perfume in the room. Turk wasn't a man to use perfume. He evidently had his moments.

He came in wearing a dressing gown, and he remembered me because he had dropped in a couple of times when his uncle was paying the overtime parking tariff.

"Hello Lieutenant," he said. "I slept late this morning. Just having a cup of coffee. Care to join me?"

"No, thanks. Mr. Crowder, I've some bad news for you," I said. It seemed to me he was prepared for something of the kind, or perhaps it was wishful thinking on my part.

"Yes," he said, and his voice was steady enough.

"Your uncle ordered a coffin," I said.

"Yes. I went along with him when he discussed specifications. Ghastly business. I told him he was carrying his preparations against exigencies too damned far."

"Perhaps not in this instance," I said. "He was found there, this morning—dead."

"Dead? In a coffin? In a coffin factory?" He looked at me curiously.

"They've taken the casket to the county morgue," I said. "I thought you should know."

"Any farewell note, or—anything?"

"Nothing but a little green pill box in the casket with him," I said. "He never struck me as being the suicidal type."

"Nor me," Turk said. "I'm—stunned. He must have had suicide in mind from the first. But why not take the pills quietly at home? Why the spectacular? I don't understand it."

"You might give me a list of enemies," I suggested. "Just in case there is a hint of murder in the investigation."

"I don't know who would murder uncle," he said. "And just how would a murderer move a two hundred and twenty pound body into a coffin factory without help? It would take two men to carry one of that weight any distance."

"It'll probably all come out in the development of the case," I said. "I'm going out to your uncle's house and talk with Primm."

"Better telephone first," he advised. "Primm has Thursdays off and occasionally makes a night of it."

I telephoned, and Primm answered. I went out and broke the news.

"This is shocking, indeed, sir," he said.

"Suppose, Primm," I suggested, "we skip the English butler role. It's a good gag and most of us have gone along with it. But this situation calls for a serious attitude."

"Why, Lieutenant, you don't think I had anything to do with it?" he asked, in good Americanese. "I liked the old guy. And I'll tell you this, Lieutenant. He wasn't the type to kill himself."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, he had anticipated a lot of things and naturally wanted to live to see how near right he was," Primm said. "He was never one to say, 'See, I told you so.' But when things turned out as he thought they might, he would go around grinning—grinning to beat the devil."

"Took a lot of pills didn't he?" I asked.

"I'll show you," he said. He led the way to Crowder's bedroom. It was a comfortable room, with a bedside radio, reading lamp, cigars and ash tray within easy reach of the bed. "Notice the fire extinguisher," he said. "Just in case he fell asleep smoking and set the bed on fire."

He opened a cabinet in the bathroom. There was a neat row of bottles.

"I know them well," Primm said. "He

had headaches. Pills headed them off. Stomach ulcers? This bottle of pills took care of everything up to a certain point. If they failed, then he switched to these. These little ones were dissolved under the tongue. And—the funny shaped green bottle is missing. That contained the potent ones. Two pills from that bottle would put a horse to sleep for a week, he told me."

"If you were a detective and familiar with Crowder's habits," I said. "What would you say happened, if anything, in this room?"

"I'd say that Mr. Crowder came in last evening, turned on the radio to the ball game," Primm said. "A careful man, but wanting to lie on the bed without bothering to remove his shoes, he spread a paper at the foot. See, it's wrinkled. He smoked a cigar part way through. Usually, he finished it. He was interrupted. Telephone call, perhaps, or a visitor at the door. Note the long ash on the cigar. That meant that he put it down and didn't pick it up again. He was a man who had the nervous habit of knocking off the ash when there really wasn't any ash there."

"Fine, so far, Primm," I said. "Go on."

PRIMM paused a moment in thought before he continued.

"He had a drink. There's a glass, with water in the bottom. Melted ice cubes, I'd say as a guess."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. This is the end of the line for me, Lieutenant. You'll have to take it from here. I'm going to miss that old fellow plenty."

"I'm sure you will," I said. "What about Turk Crowder?"

"You don't think—?"

"I consider all angles," I said. "It has to be done."

"Preparation against an exigency," Primm suggested, smiling, but his eyes were serious. I nodded, and he said, "Turk and his uncle yah-yahed a lot. Mr. Crowder said Turk reminded him of a buzzard. He was always around, hovering. You never heard him until you saw him. And he was waiting—waiting for the victim to drop, as a turkey buzzard does. You know, Lieutenant, a buzzard isn't like a hawk. Hawks strike their victims down. Buzzards must wait. Turk was always waiting, his uncle said."

"Any violent quarrels?"

"No, just yah-yahing. Mr. Crowder thought Turk should get the lead out of his pants and expand his business, instead of just resting on his oars. It burned Mr. Crowder up to realize that Turk wasn't sweating to expand his business because in a short time, maybe, he'd walk into a half million dollar inheritance."

"You've been very helpful, Primm," I said. "Maintain the usual butler's attitude in this matter."

"A discreet one, sir," he said, slipping into the butler's role again.

He was a cool one, I thought as I drove back to town. He had played butler so long that the role was easy enough. And yet when I had asked him to be himself, he had readily complied. Definitely, I liked Primm.

The autopsy was under way when I dropped in on Doc Kummer. Turk Crowder was smoking in a nearby room, answering reporters' questions. Turk gave me what I thought was an anxious glance.

"What did Primm have to say?" he asked me then.

"It was his evening off, but he was very helpful in giving me a line on your uncle's habits," I answered. "And he quickly noted a bottle was missing from the medicine cabinet. I presume it is the one found in the coffin."

"I've been covering the court house twenty-five years," a reporter said. "And this is the first time I ever heard of anybody ordering a coffin tailored to fit, then crawling into it. You don't suppose he ordered his grave dug, too?"

"My uncle was eccentric," Turk Crowder said with dignity, "but he never carried his foresight to that extent, I'm sure. I think this was impulse, pure and simple."

"Ordering a coffin and crawling into it ten days later," the reporter said, "is dragging an impulse an awful long distance. I'll bet my shirt he did order a grave dug!"

In stiff tones, Turk gave the cemetery's name. "The family plot is located there," he said. "Check on it if you like." He sneered. "There's no limit to a reporter's imagination."

"You get a hunch and you play it, Mr. Crowder," the reporter said. "I don't like intruding on a man at a time

like this, but that's the way my business is."

He put in a call to the cemetery, phrased his question and waited.

"Well, I hope to kiss a pig, Mr. Crowder," he said a moment later when he hung up. "I guessed that one. The Marlowe Mortuary ordered the grave site adjoining Mrs. Crowder's dug."

I reached for the telephone. "I want to know who authorized the Marlowe Mortuary to dig the grave," I said. "We didn't learn of Mr. Crowder's death until this morning, and yet his grave is waiting."

"My uncle must have authorized this," the younger Crowder admitted. "I'm prepared to believe anything now. Thank God, the family is limited to me. That nobody else has to share this disgrace."

AT the mortuary I contacted someone who made a quick check. "No one here authorized the digging of a grave in the Crowder plot," I was told.

"Thank you," I answered, then hung up and said to Turk, "Well, what do you make of that?"

"There's only one answer," he said. "Uncle impersonated someone at the mortuary, and the cemetery didn't check back."

He picked up the telephone and called the cemetery. Again there was delay while records were checked. He listened quietly to the report.

"The order was telephoned in, supposedly from the mortuary, at ten o'clock that night," he told me when he had hung up. "Now, can the coroner's men determine whether Uncle was alive at that hour?"

I called in Doc and he said, "We think that the deceased died sometime between two and three o'clock this morning."

"Can you determine when the pills were taken?" I asked.

"It was quite a husky dose," Doc replied. "If he has taken strong doses of the pills and developed a tolerance, then a greater quantity would be required to bring on death than for someone who had not developed a tolerance."

"If they were self-administered," I suggested, "the deceased would have realized this, and made sure of death by emptying the bottle?"

"As you know, Tim," Doc replied, "the bottle was empty."

"Are you hinting at murder?" the old reporter asked bluntly.

"A detective kicks that possibility around," I reminded him.

"How do you account for the fact that he went into the coffin factory and climbed into the tailored-to-fit job under his own power?" he asked.

"I haven't accounted for that, and several other points," I answered.

"We'll turn the evidence over to a coroner's jury," Doc said, "and see what happens."

"Just a minute, Lieutenant," the reporter said. "My story isn't complete. If you think it's murder, then who? Why? And—"

"My case isn't complete," I said, taking any possible sting out of my words with a grin. "When my case is complete, your story should be complete."

I followed Turk outside. "I'll drive you home," I said.

"Don't bother," he said. "I'll call a cab. I want to stop at the mortuary and make arrangements. As soon as the body is released, I suppose the funeral will be in order."

"Hop in," I said, opening the door to the Bureau car.

He turned to me in surprise. "Is this an arrest?"

"Of course not," I answered.

He got in and I started toward the mortuary. The newsboys were already shouting, and I could see SUICIDE in big headlines on their papers.

"I wish you had stuck with your uncle while he was in the casket factory, Mr. Crowder," I said to Turk. "You might have recalled scraps of conversation that would have been helpful."

"I just couldn't take it," he answered. "A man ordering his own coffin and doing it in a light-hearted manner! Then the setting—whining saws, sawdust in the air. And through a door and into a room where there were bolts of the gray cloth you stare at when you go to funerals. The girls tufting satin and lining the interior. And finally the display room. An automobile display room is one thing, but caskets—" He shuddered.

I waited while he made arrangements for a private funeral, then drove him back to the apartment.

"By the way, Mr. Crowder," I said then. "I'll keep you posted on developments. And I think you were wise in arranging a private funeral. Otherwise

the place would be packed with the morbidly curious."

OF COURSE I attended the funeral. The invited were few in number, the deceased's business associates, close personal friends—and Primm, who sat with me and was very sad.

The reporters were around, expecting little, but playing safe. And they dropped into my office afterwards. The fellows smelled a climax and I didn't disappoint them.

"Okay, boys," I said, "I'll make a statement."

"Shoot," the old reporter said.

"Judson Crowder was the victim of premeditated murder," I said. "The murderer took advantage of his victim's habit of preparing for exigencies. Remember, Crowder admitted he took various kinds of pills for his ailments. He made a joke of it, and it was common knowledge. The pills, plus ordering the casket, played right into the hands of an enemy who had waited, impatiently, for some time."

"And the enemy?" one asked.

"Will be arrested within seventy-two hours," I promised. "I'll not name him, but I've had a good idea of his identity from the first. The delay has been due to the necessity of gathering evidence."

"Is it okay with you, Lieutenant, to ask Turk Crowder and Primm what they think of this turn in affairs?" the old reporter asked.

"Isn't that logical reportorial procedure?" I asked.

"Sure, but you've always given us a break," the reporter replied, "and we like to string along with you."

Five minutes after the story hit the streets, Primm and Crowder telephoned. Each had made a statement to the press, which was in quotes, but it was apparent they had waited to read the whole story before contacting me.

"I'm glad this business is going to be cleared up," Primm said. "By the way, I maintained my butler role to the reporters."

"So I noticed," I answered.

"Will you do me a favor, Lieutenant?" Turk asked. "When you arrest my uncle's murderer, I'd like to be present. I don't see how you worked out this case, and some day I'd like to hear the story."

"I'll make the arrest tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock," I answered. "And I'll be very glad to give you details. Be at my office at that time. And thank you for calling."

Several minor matters kept me occupied the next day, but by quarter of three my desk was clear, and I lit a cigarette, stepped to the window and watched the foot and auto traffic on the street below. At three o'clock, Turk Crowder came in.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"You've been under quite a strain, Turk," I said. "Don't you think it would help if you would confess?"

"Are you utterly mad?" he asked coldly. "My arrest will make you the laughing stock of the city. I have a good business. I've been enjoying life. I was certain to be my uncle's heir. So why should I be foolish enough to kill him?"

"Impatience," I answered. "Have you noticed your face lately? Have you checked your weight? Your face is drawn, and you've lost weight from the strain. Here's what happened. You waited a long time for a situation to develop that would form a suicide pattern. You hoped it would come, but it seemed as if it never would. Then he ordered his casket. That was a natural. You worked fast.

"You dropped in for an informal visit. He was on his bed, listening to the radio. You fixed him up with a highball, mixing in pills from the bottle we later found in the casket. He was in a stupor. You helped him into your car and drove to the factory. Probably you had had a key made. The lock was simple. It could have been picked. You helped him in under his own power. The janitor had cleaned up, but cedar sawdust was always in the air. And little eddies had gathered. His shoe soles picked up dust along the edges—proof he was staggering and the weight was on the edges of his shoes when he tried to retain his balance.

"You lifted him to the casket, placed him in the accepted position, and watched to make certain he didn't move. He didn't. You departed, Crowder, satisfied that you had done a thorough job. Well, I found sawdust on the floor of your car," I concluded, "and when I drove you to the mortuary the other

day, I had dusted the floor of my car and got a good imprint of your rubber heel. It matched faint heel marks left on the casket factory floor." My eyes never left Turk's face. "Remembering, anything you say may be used against you, will it help to confess? I hand it to you. Your cold nerve has served you well all the way through. You planned the innocent nephew role, and played it out. But you had one devil of a time building up courage to keep this appointment. I saw you walk past the entrance three times before you came into the building."

I WAITED, sensing the strain was cumulative. That was why I had told the reporters the arrest would be made within seventy-two hours. I wanted Turk Crowder's conscience—such as it was—to work on him.

In a sense, I suppose the Turk Crowder breed considers itself a gambling breed. But when the chips are down, does it gamble on a hung jury or a lawyer's eloquence? No, it can't stand the strain of the gamble. And Turk was no exception.

He made a dive for the half open window. But I was expecting it and made a flying tackle.

Then the room was full of detectives and he was in a chair, rumpled, wild-eyed and beaten.

"Okay, I'll confess." I could see relief flowing into his face. It usually does. "It happened, just about as you worked out the case, damn you. I was a wild kid. He tried to tame me for my own good, and I never forgave him for it. But—why were you so sure, Donovan? Where did I slip? What clue did you pick up?"

"I can't claim any credit for this case," I answered, more to the others than Crowder. "A year ago Judson Crowder dropped in while paying up on his overtime parking tickets. He said, 'It's a terrible thing to mention, but you know how I am on preparing against exigencies, Lieutenant. But—if ever I should die under violent or mysterious circumstances, my nephew, Turk, will bear close investigation. Often when he's around, I feel as if he were a buzzard—soaring, soaring on silent wings—waiting.'"

●

Smuggling Via Canines

FROM about 1935 to well into 1941, despite the war, a group of European smugglers operated profitably by using dogs to carry their contraband across national frontiers. This is the true story of how it was done:

The band maintained its headquarters in Upper Alsace, France, and several distributing points in Switzerland. The dogs' training began in France where they were treated unusually well and fed large quantities of excellent food. After they had grown accustomed to this fine life and their kindly masters, they were led to the distributing points in Switzerland.

Here their treatment was very much different. A man dressed in the uniform of a customs official beat them repeatedly and they received barely enough food to keep them alive. After an interval a pack, containing fine Swiss watches and other valuables, which was made to simulate their torsos, was fitted about them, and they were released. Naturally the dogs headed for the place where they had been well treated.

To encourage them on their way and teach them to avoid all contact with humans until they got there members of the gang were strategically placed along the route to attack the dogs with whips or to fire dried peas at them with low calibre guns.

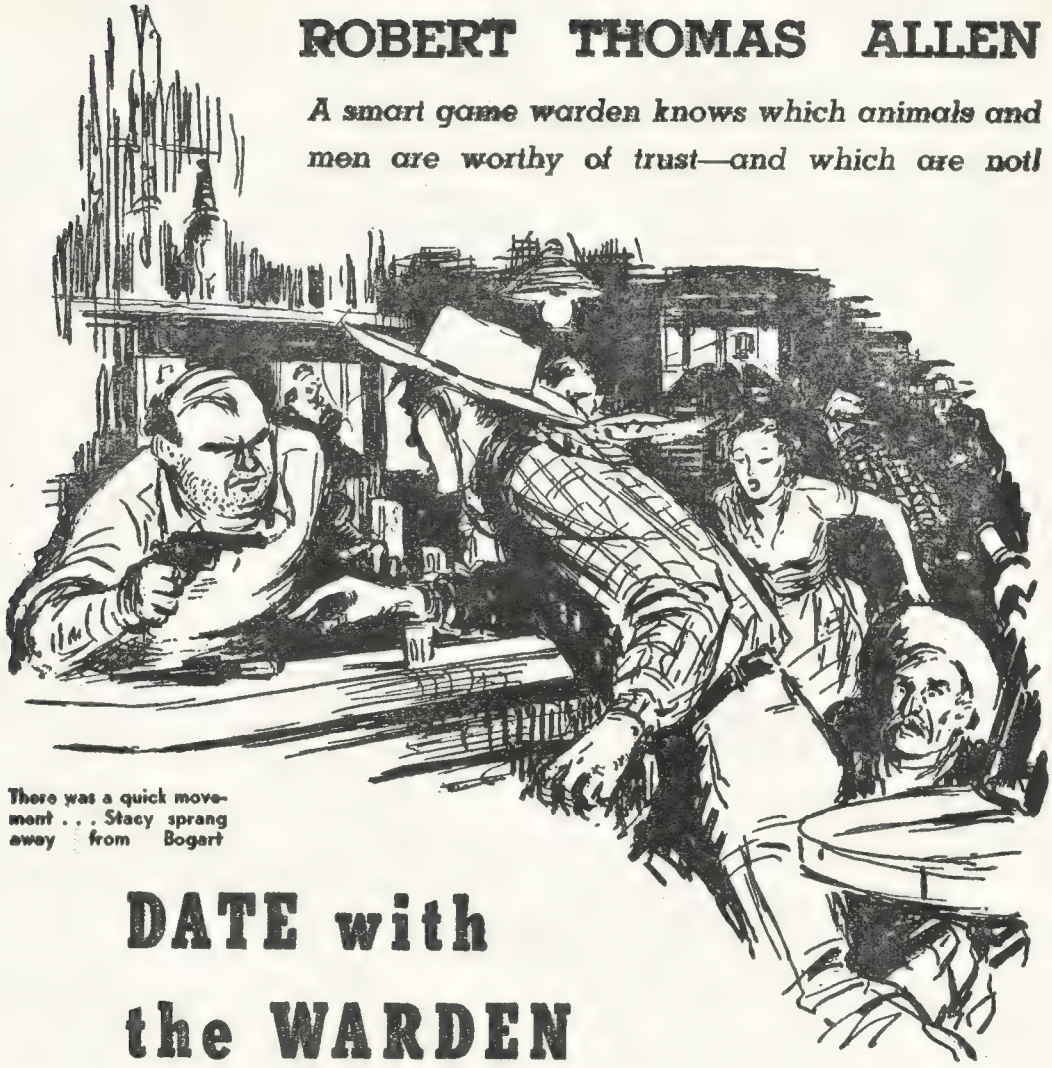
After one or two such adventures, the dogs became expert at crossing the border undetected—and the amount of time they spent in the Swiss distributing points could be reduced to a bare day or two.

Some of the dogs, always traveling alone, made as many as twenty trips each before the gang was caught by customs officials after one of them had talked because he felt that he had been cheated of his fair share of the loot.

—*Mark Knight*

ROBERT THOMAS ALLEN

A smart game warden knows which animals and men are worthy of trust—and which are not!



There was a quick movement . . . Stacy sprang away from Bogart

DATE with the WARDEN

A WEEK after they found Ross Burnett, the game warden, sprawled in the tules beside the body of young Jimmy Bogart—Jimmy with a slug through his middle and Burnett with his head in the Colorado and the bottom of his spine blown out by a .12 gauge shotgun—they sent a new game warden to eastern San Bernardino County.

His name was Stacy O'Donnell, and the first thing he did was run a reminder in the Vejo *Star* that any hunting on the wildlife refuge would be prosecuted by law.

"Maybe so," old Jim Bogart said grimly in "Smiley" Kregar's bar. "But anybody tries to stop me hunting where I darned well please, better come up behind me!"

That was the general feeling around Vejo. Especially among the old-timers, who couldn't stomach being told where to hunt on the desert they'd won with burro, miner's pick and six-gun.

And, with Bogart, the feeling was given a dangerous edge by Jimmy's death. Nobody knew just what had happened down there in the tules. But everybody figured that Burnett had gotten tough with Jimmy for hunting on the game refuge and the two of them had shot it out. Jimmy had only been eight-

een, and the people of Vejo didn't exactly feel like welcoming the new warden with open arms.

But Stacy O'Donnell didn't seem to notice. For a couple of days he mooched around the blister-hot town, a husky young Texan, maybe twenty-eight, with a good-natured face sunburned a healthy red, and a way of grinning out from under his tip-tilted, saucer-brimmed hat.

Then he made his camp down near the backwater, across from town. From then on, he spent his off time with his chair propped against his tent pole, eating peanuts out of a paper bag and squinting out at the burro sage with a faraway, thoughtful look in his pale blue eyes.

He was sitting like that the day Maria Bogart went out to see him. He squinted up from under his hat brim to where she stood against the blazing sunlight, her blue jeans rolled up to the calves of her slender brown legs, and looked straight into the .38 she held leveled at the second button on his khaki shirt.

His hand stopped halfway to his lips and his jaw slowly stopped munching.

"That's a mighty dangerous-looking weapon you're carrying there, Ma'am. I'd feel a lot better if you'd point it the other way."

"Don't try to take it away from me," Maria warned in a quick, tense whisper.

Stacy's eyes flicked over Maria's oval face, with its olive skin and the slanting dark eyes she'd inherited from her Mexican mother.

"What am I supposed to do?"

"I came to see you about my father—Jim Bogart—the man you tried to summons this morning. I want you to promise you won't try to arrest him."

"Why?"

The girl sucked in her breath, was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Because he's going to kill you!"

"That's mighty ornery of your father, Ma'am."

Stacy brushed the peanut shells from his lap. He began to get up, slowly, his eyes not forgetting the gun.

The muzzle of the .38 wavered, began to drop. Maria brought it up suddenly. Her eyes blazed.

"My father told it all over town that he'll kill you if you try to arrest him. Everybody knows about it. And he will! He killed more than one man in the old days, before there was any law out here. I don't want him getting into trouble."

"Seeing I'm to be the victim, Ma'am, neither do I."

Stacy was on his feet now. His lips were still parted in a half smile.

"Better give me that gun."

Maria's eyes searched his face. They were still smoldering, but there was indecision in them now. It was clear that the warden wasn't going to be bluffed.

Then she dropped her gun hand to her side, giving him a last furious look, wheeled toward the car she'd left under the tamarisk trees by the road.

"I hope he kills you," she flung back over her shoulder.

IT WAS forty-five miles around to Vejo by the Jessup bridge, while it was only five miles by boat. Stacy could be in town long before her.

She came back to the tent. Stacy had taken the chair inside and was padlocking the wooden door to his tent. Maria stood there, watching, swallowing her pride. She said finally:

"Are you going now?"

Stacy turned in surprise. He nodded. "I'm crossing in the outboard in a few minutes. Why?"

"I'll go with you—if—if I may. I might be able to stop trouble."

"You'd better not."

"If anything happens, I want to be there."

Stacy looked thoughtful.

"Okay," he said finally. "What about your car?"

"I'll pick it up later."

Stacy slid the skiff into the silt-laden backwater. When Maria was huddled in the bow, he poled out from shore and started the engine. He wheeled the skiff like a baby carriage and nosed it out through the jungle of dead honeypod and screwbean mesquites that raised gaunt bare arms above the muddy water.

Mud hens broke from their path, half flying, half running on the water, like waddling windup toys. Cormorants and herons rose slowly from the tules ahead. The sun seemed to spread over the entire sky in an explosion of blinding white light. The heat beat from above and came up from the boat, pressing in like a scorched wool blanket.

Stacey jockeyed his way toward the main channel, his face turned toward Vejo. The smile had left his eyes. They seemed focused on some distant problem, that allowed for no wrong moves.

They grounded on a sandbar and Stacy cut the motor. He began working the skiff free with an oar.

"Don't think I want trouble with your daddy," he said abruptly. "It's not going to make things easier for me, tying into an old-timer that's as well liked as he is around town."

Maria didn't answer at first. Then she said, "Just what was he doing this morning that was so unlawful?"

"He spotted a quail on the bank while he was fishing, and took a couple of shots at it with his rifle. I started out to his boat, but my motor conked out. I called to him and he just looked right through me, then rowed over to the other shore. Maybe you think it's nothing—all this just because someone shot a quail. But it's more than that. It's the town of Vejo feeling me out. I can't let it go."

Stacy poled free of the sandbar and nosed the skiff into a narrow, swift-running sluice that joined the backwater to the main channel of the Colorado. Near its mouth, he cut the motor and nudged the boat into the yellow mud of the bank.

"We stop for a few minutes here, while I finish something I was doing when I tangled with your daddy."

Getting out, he led the way through the tall, sun-brittle tules, scrambling over a trail slicked down by beaver and coming out on the bank of the main channel.

For a long while Stacy studied the water. Then, as if he'd found what he was looking for, he turned to Maria.

"Now, Ma'am, if you'll just wander back there a little way, I'm going to take a swim."

Maria's mouth opened. "You pick a fine time!" she fumed. But Stacy was already pulling off his boots, so she turned toward the boat.

When he joined her about ten minutes later, wet patches showing through his shirt, he was carrying a bundle of dripping net.

"Funniest things you find if you go swimming around here." He tossed the bundle into the boat. "That's what they call a fyke net. Usually they're made of wire. Too many of them around and there wouldn't be any fish left in the Colorado."

He shoved the boat off and bent over the motor.

"I suppose you're going to try pinning that on my father," Maria said.

"No, Ma'am. Your daddy might take the odd potshot at a bird out of bounds, but he's not the type to play hog like whoever planted that net out there."

STACY steadied the motor, ready to pull the starting cord. He looked back at Maria.

"Some men, Ma'am, are like frisky dogs—tear up slippers and run in the flower bed now and then. That's like your daddy. But there are others like mean-eyed mongrels, born shifty and vicious. That's the kind of man that put that net there. If it's any interest to you, I've been trailing him ever since I got here. This is the last bit of evidence I need to make a case. And it's going to be a serious one."

Maria's voice was like ice. "The other warden didn't seem to be so legal-minded. He used his gun instead—on a boy in his teens, my brother."

Stacy gave her a queer look. "A warden has to be mighty handy with his gun, Ma'am. More than one has started to serve someone a summons, and left the spot on a one-way trip to the morgue."

"My brother wouldn't have killed anybody except in self-defense," Maria said hotly.

"I wouldn't know anything about that," Stacy answered quietly.

He yanked the cord, the motor broke into its drone. He headed the skiff out into the main channel.

The Vejo boat landing was three miles from town. Stacy tied the skiff to the wharf.

"My car's at Fritz's," he said. "I left it there last night. I'll take you into town."

Fritz was behind the lunch counter when they came in. Young Charlie Dionne, tall and narrow-hipped in skintight denims and check shirt, was looking at the names on a juke box. Seeing Maria with Stacy, Charlie frowned his surprise. He said hello to her, and then his eyes shifted to Stacy and his mouth went hard.

Fritz spoke up quickly, perspiration pebbling his fat face.

"What'll it be today, Stacy?" he asked.

His tone was casual, but he looked queerly at Stacy. Stacy turned to Maria.

"It'll take a few minutes to gas up the

car," he said. "I could use a bottle of pop. I'm dried out."

"Better make it coffe, folks," Fritz advised. "Do you more good, this kind of weather. Cold drinks are hard on the old pumper."

"Okay, Fritz. You should know."

He shoved the cups across the counter, his eyes on Stacy. He seemed to want to say something, but didn't know how to start."

"Nice and mild, isn't it, Fritz?" Stacy said.

"Mild?"

"I mean that the sun's sure got all the frost out of the air."

Fritz laughed, uncertainly. Something electric hung in the oven-hot room. The tires of a car whined past on the highway, faded into a faint hum.

Charlie came over to the counter. "Maria," he said, his eyes boring steadily into Stacy's. "If there's any trouble —*if* anything happens to your father, I'll even things up."

"Stacy," Fritz said quickly, "it's none of my business, but I wouldn't go into town right now. Bogart's waiting for you."

Stacy held his cup in both hands, his elbows on the counter. He squinted up at Fritz from under his hat brim.

"Where?"

"He's at Smiley Kregar's bar. It's no good. The town's against you. It's going to be you or him. And if it's him, the town'll be down on you more than ever. Somebody will get you—somebody like this crazy kid."

He jerked his head toward Charlie.

"Thanks, Fritz," Stacy said. "Quit worrying."

He got off the stool and faced Charlie. They were direct opposites physically—Charlie like a rawhide whip, thin-lipped and tense; Stacy solid and hefty-shouldered, and grinning.

"Everybody seems to be getting excited around here," Stacy said finally. "I guess it's the heat." He turned to Fritz. "Any more of those peanuts I got the other day?"

"Sure! Just got some in."

"Fill up a bag, will you? I've run out."

Stacy offered some to Maria when they turned along the highway toward town. Maria shook her head. Stacy started cracking a peanut between his thumb and finger. He fixed his eyes far ahead on the road, and from then on seemed lost in thought.

CARS passed through Vejo now instead of range ponies, and service stations took the place of hitching rails. But it was still a cowtown, fixed up. The old false-fronted buildings were there, sun-blackened, unpainted. Everything off the highway was sand and rock.

Stacy parked outside the Santa Fe station. "This is the end of the line."

"I'm going with you," Maria told him, her voice almost a whisper.

"I think you'd be better off at home."

"I'm going with you."

It was an odd sight, the stocky young Texan with his hat tilted almost over his eyes walking along eating peanuts, and beside him, the slender, dark-eyed girl, her face tense and anxious. A few motorists looked at them and grinned. But there was no grin on the faces of the inhabitants.

Hess, the barber, came out to his doorway, took one look and hurried back inside. He reappeared without his white jacket and followed a good distance behind. A group of Mexican youths standing in the lobby of the movie theater stared solemnly, then began to talk swiftly and excitedly and moved in the direction of Smiley Kregar's bar.

It was a good many years since Vejo had seen a shooting. Most of the people had only heard about them from the old-timers. They didn't intend to miss the real thing now.

It seemed hotter in town than out on the desert. The big thermometer in the shade of the Santa Fe station showed one hundred and thirty degrees. Two dogs lay flat on their sides on the pavement outside Smiley Kregar's bar.

Stacy tossed a peanut to each of them. They took a disinterested sniff and let their heads drop again. Stacy stood to one side and let Maria go in the door, then followed her.

They saw Bogart the minute they entered. He was sitting at a table toward the back, close enough to the bar to touch it. He faced the door, his chair tilted against the wall. He was a man of about sixty, with skin burned the color of crisp bacon, and a little white mustache. He wore an undented, high-crowned Western hat with a stiff brim.

The sound of voices came to a sudden stop, as if sliced off with a knife. The

room was as hot and silent as an arroyo floor.

There were half a dozen men sitting at the bar. They all looked toward the door. A drunk started to talk.

"Darned if this ain't the hottest place I've ever been in my life! I just put my bare arm on the bar—"

The man next to him elbowed him and he broke off with a surprised grunt.

Then Bogart's voice rang out, hard and clear.

"Maria! Get out of here!"

"Dad, don't do anything!" she cried.

"Go home. Leave this to me."

"Not till you come with me."

Stacy was standing just inside the door, cracking a peanut. His eyes, hardly seeming to move, took in the room.

Kregar was behind the bar, a moon-faced, slope-shouldered man with a day's whisker growth making a sooty backdrop for his grin. He shot a glance toward a pug-nosed waiter at the other end of the bar, then started talking in his whining, high-pitched voice, bobbing his head as he spoke.

"If it ain't the new refuge man! Didn't think you'd ever git around to paying us a visit, Cap'n. Said to a friend of mine—let's see; just yesterday, that was—seems like the new man ain't fixin' to bother with an old mud hen like me. Can't blame him, though, I said. Must be mighty busy with the pack of vultures they is around Vejo. So hep me, they'd steal a fella's false teeth! Now take a fella trying to round up those coyotes—"

"Shut up, Smiley!" Bogart ordered. He sat stone still, his right hand resting on his knee, his other hanging down at his side. His eyes never left Stacy. "I was just showing Smiley and the boys here a gun I used to use in the old days." Without moving his gaze, he held out his hand toward Smiley. "Shove that along the bar."

Smiley sent the gun sliding to within a few inches of the old man's finger tips. It was an old-style Colt .44, with an inlaid ivory handle.

STACY walked slowly toward Bogart. He popped another peanut into his mouth. Maria waited, near the door, terror widening her eyes. The men at the bar slipped quietly from their stools and moved over to the far wall. Two of them headed noiselessly for the door.

"That looks like quite a gun, Mr. Bogart," Stacy said. "I guess those things came in mighty handy in the old days, when there wasn't any law to take care of folks' rights for them. I hear you got a couple of notches on yours."

"Four. Each one for a coyote that pushed me too hard."

Stacy kept coming. Kregar's smile was stuck on his yellow teeth. The silence of death was on the room.

"I bet they all got a fair draw, too," Stacy said.

"They did. The same as if you put your gun on the bar now, and we both reached at the same time."

Stacy put his hand through his shirt front, beneath his arm, and drew his .38 from its holster. He slid it along the bar near Bogart's gun.

Stacy moved up farther. He was beside his gun. He stood about four feet from Bogart now.

He started to put his bag of peanuts on the bar.

"Maybe I should tell you," he said. "You're under arrest."

"That's something you'll have to prove, Warden," the old man grated.

Every eye in the room was on the bar, where the two guns lay side by side. There was a moment that seemed to last forever.

It happened so fast nobody quite realized what was going on. Instead of putting the bag on the bar, Stacy whipped it at Bogart. Peanuts hit the old man in the face, scattering on the floor and over the bar. At the same time, Stacy's foot lashed out and hooked Bogart's chair away from the wall. Stacy moved with a lithe swiftness unexpected in his stocky body. He was over Bogart, one knee on his chest, Bogart's arms pinned to the floor.

Bogart writhed and cursed, but he seemed held in a vise.

"Get off me, you fool!" he fumed.

Stacy looked around the room. He didn't seem to be working too hard. His eyes found Maria.

"There are a few things you should know, Ma'am. Maybe this is as good a time to tell you as any, while your daddy is resting nice and comfortable."

Bogart lay there, red creeping up behind his tan. But he quit wearing himself out struggling, and lay still.

Stacy's voice was the only sound in the room. "The last warden, Ross Bur-

nett, was a friend of mine. I had a letter from him, written the night before he was found dead with your brother. He was going to close in that night on a lawbreaker here at Vejo—one of those mean-eyed mongrels I was telling you about—the same one that planted that net I picked up on the way here. He had been netting bass and snaring quail on the reserve, and hauling them to a supper-club owner in Los Angeles."

Stacy paused, and his eyes seemed to take in the whole room.

"Your brother knew the river and was helping him, trying to pick up some pocket money. He was only a kid. He didn't realize what a serious thing he was doing, or the kind of men he was playing with. Burnett just intended to give your brother a scare and a fine. Your brother didn't die in a duel with Burnett, Ma'am. He was killed by that mongrel—"

There was a quick movement behind the bar. Stacy sprang away from Bogart. Smiley Kregar had Bogart's gun, just about the time Stacy reached his own. The slug from Smiley's gun smashed a bottle on one of the tables and richoted to the ceiling.

There was a scramble for the door. Maria screamed. Stacy went to his knees in front of the bar. Smiley dropped behind it.

"You're under arrest, Kregar!" Stacy called. "Come out in front!"

There was no whine in Kregar's voice when he answered, "You come and git me!"

Stacy began to edge toward the end of the bar.

"Too bad you killed that boy to cover up, Kregar," he said. "Maybe he wouldn't have spilled that you killed Burnett when Burnett jumped you."

NOBODY had been watching the waiter who had moved out from behind the bar.

A gun exploded in his hand and Stacy went sprawling, a red patch spreading on his shoulder.

Jim Bogart, on his feet now, grabbed a bottle and swung.

The waiter dropped like a steer hit by an ax.

In the commotion, Stacy slid his hand up over the bar, grabbed a glass and threw it to the other end. In the split-second that it splintered against a couple of bottles, with enough noise to attract Smiley's attention, Stacy was around the end of the bar.

"Turn around, Kregar!"

Kregar's head and shoulders appeared, whipping around to face Stacy. The blast of his gun was drowned by Stacy's. Smiley's head and shoulder disappeared, and there was the sound of his body hitting the floor. Stacy straightened, staring grimly at the spot where Kregar had fallen.

The others in the room came over to the bar.

Bogart was the first to speak.

"You nearly bust my arms, young fella, holding me there on the floor. But after seeing the way you handled that gun of yours, I guess I got off easy." The feeling he tried to disguise by his gruff voice was there in his eyes as he looked into Stacy's. "I want to thank you, son. You can figure on one more citizen of Vejo being behind you and the game preserve."

"But my brother—" Maria began. Her eyes, big in her pale face, were on Stacy.

"I did a lot of guessing about that," Stacy said. "I figured that Kregar got Burnett, then shot your brother to cover up. Then he took the boy's shotgun and blasted Burnett's corpse over the wound of his own bullet, put the shotgun back in your brother's hand and swapped revolvers with Burnett's body. It looked like such a clear case of a gun duel that nobody thought to check on it."

A crowd had gathered outside in the glare of the sun, and a State cop was parking his motorcycle at the curb when Stacy, Maria and Bogart stepped outside.

Stacy gave a quick account to the cop and they headed for the hospital to get Stacy's shoulder fixed up.

It was an hour later when they left the hospital.

As they moved along the street, Stacy said:

"Now, if I can just get another bag of peanuts, I'll be as good as new."

Bogart grinned. "Well, I'd better get along now. I hope I see a lot more of you, son." He started to leave.

"Just a minute," Stacy said to the old man. "You're not free yet. I'm going to slap a fine on you for shooting protected birds—at least, *trying* to shoot them. I'll drop the action I was contemplating for your ungentlemanly behavior."

He turned to Maria, his eyes laughing up from under his hat brim. "I didn't tell you everything that happened this morning, Ma'am. Your father didn't just sit there when my motor stalled. He called me some mighty disrespectful names."

A sheepish grin stole into Bogart's weathered face.

"I wasn't cussin' you. I was cussin' those quail for hanging around the reserve."

"I feed them peanuts," Stacy said, grinning. "Nothing like peanuts for attracting things." He turned to Maria. "Do you like them, Ma'am?"

Maria looked at Stacy, and a new expression stole into her eyes.

"I love them!" she said, voice soft.

"I'll sure have to get me a barrel full!"

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

Waltz With Death

A Suspenseful Mystery Novelet

By KELLEY ROOS

The Dark Doorway

A Baffling Crime Novelet

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

Portrait of a Killer

An Exciting Novelet

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

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A Bargain IN CRIME

by SAM SLEUTH

THERE is nothing like a good crime mystery story on a crisp autumn night—or so we always say. Seriously, there is something about the chill of winter in the air, the shortening evenings, the acrid-sweet blend of burnt leaves and woodsmoke that seems to go with a hot fireside and cold chills induced by a first class murder tale. So this time, in our searchings, we have endeavored to come up with the sort of books that fit the evenings that lie ahead for all of us. Culled from the cream of the 25c reprint detective-story market, currently available at all newsstands, they are guaranteed to make the most brazen and unimaginative readers tread wearily in the darkness.

Reviews in Brief

THERE'S ALWAYS TIME TO DIE by Octavus Roy Cohen

When George Carey recovers consciousness aboard a homeward bound Caribbean cruise ship, he finds himself a hero. He has rescued a passenger fallen overboard with a daring leap from the rail. He also, however, finds himself a total stranger, with some eight years blanked out of his life.

Everybody calls him Larry Wilson and, when the ship arrives in New York, he is greeted by a delightful charmer who seems unquestionably to be his—Larry Wilson's, that is—wife. He also finds out that, as a manufacturer in a small Southern city, he is seriously involved in a murder case that has trapped his "best friend," Duncan Campbell.

Mr. Cohen is in top form in this story of melodramatic mystery, and the yarn is a hummer. It saw screen production with William Powell and Myrna Loy in the leading roles, under the title of I'LL LOVE YOU AGAIN.

●

PURSUIT OF A PARCEL by Patricia Wentworth

Sometimes great events can be influenced by seeming trivialities—something which Ben Franklin stated wittily in his "Horseshoe Nail" verse and something which Mrs. Wentworth handles brilliantly in this, one of her very best yarns.

Things start moving when a sailor delivers an apparently innocuous brown paper parcel to an English law firm. The clerk to whom it is consigned hears a housebreaker in his villa, where he has taken the parcel. Then a young woman named Delia, who gets it, finds alien footprints outside her library window.

Apparent trivialities, these—but they are part of a vast and tricky pattern of international intrigue, with cool and clever men in Berlin and Whitehall pulling the strings. A first class story of murder, mystery and the reverse of the coin of government. Swift, sweet and chilling all the way.

●

SHEAR THE BLACK SHEEP by David Dodge

Accountants can get into the darndest spots—in mystery stories at any rate—and Jim Whitney proves no exception in this spine tingler. He tries to refuse when millionaire John Clayton offers him sixty dollars per day to investigate the shady activities of Clayton's son, pleading that he is no detective.

But Clayton is not the man to brook such a refusal and before many hours have passed, Whit finds himself in a veritable swamp of woe. Clayton, it seems, has fallen into bad company—much of it really bad—and in the process of trying to get him back on the right track, Whit gets slugged, does some slugging on his own account—then finds himself right in the middle of a murder.

This is a fine story of the hard-hitting variety—one that will make the reader—that, of course, is you—regard all strange shadows with suspicion and trepdiation.

●

BLOOD ON HER SHOE by Medora Field

October, of course, with its Hallowe'en is the ideal time for a ghost hunt—but beware of such a ghost hunt as that put on in

a cemetery on St. Simon's Island by Cousin Chattie. The ghost appears on the dot and Aunt Chattie's guests huddle together in a fine old panic, watching it drift among the headstones.

Unfortunately, however, a murderer puts in an unscheduled appearance at the same moment, stabbing the gorgeous if dangerous Sylvia Scott with an antique Spanish dagger lifted without permission from Aunt Chattie's drawing room.

A fine beginning for a fine chilling time —and before BLOOD ON HER SHOE is finished the chills come thick and heavy. This is a perfect story for the season. You won't want to miss it.

GOOD CRIMES ARE COMING

(Continued from page 7)

disposed of the blonde took her handbag and vanished down the hallway. A few minutes later Stan came out of his dancing studio and hurried to the elevators.

The Laughing Face

When the elevator doors had closed upon him, Judy went back to his studio. She opened the door. The room was still filled with waltz music. Stan's brunette dancing teacher was still there. But she was lying in the middle of the floor with a bullet hole in her back, just below her left shoulder.

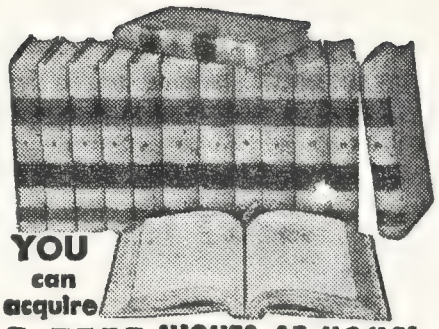
Horrified, Judy dropped to her knees beside the girl. In the girl's hand was a crumpled square of white cardboard. On both sides of the cardboard a girl's laughing face had been drawn in pencil. Judy took the cardboard and stood up.

Then, as she glanced about the room, fresh horror struck her. She searched in vain for a means of exit for the killer. The only exit was the door through which Stan had emerged. No one had entered after Judy had seen Stan dancing with the teacher. And no one had emerged after Stan!

Quickly Judy realized that when the dancer was found all suspicion would focus upon Stan. The register book would show his name for the five-thirty appointment with the brunette. He was the last to see her.

With her heart in her mouth Judy raced into the corridor. Fortunately she found the reception room empty. Her darting eyes

[*Turn page*]



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picked out the register. Stan's name was there and so was the name of the teacher —Anita Farrell. Some wild protective impulse prompted Judy to take the register and flee.

Judy raced home. But Stan wasn't in their apartment. She made the rounds of his favorite eating places without success. At ten-thirty she bought a tabloid and read the dreaded headline: DANCING TEACHER SLAIN. POLICE SEEK WALTZER. Yes, Judy told herself, and Stan was the waltzer the police were hunting!

A Perfect Frame-Up

Going back home again, Judy was amazed to find Stan asleep in a chair. She roused him, showed him the newspaper, recounted her discovery. One word from Stan and she knew Stan had not killed the girl. But who had? With a sense of frustration they both realized that the killer, either by accident or design, had rigged a perfect frame-up around Stan.

The days and nights that followed became a nightmare of increasing terror for Judy and Stan. Hunted by the police, recognized by another dancing pupil in a café and forced to flee, Stan found himself a fugitive. In desperation Judy got a job as a teacher in the studio so that she could use her position to unearth some information about the murder that would clear Stan. Her action proved to be a boomerang for it brought her straight to the heart of peril and marked her for the murderer's attention.

"Waltz with Death" moves rapidly from one exciting sequence to another. Readers will find it a thoroughly stimulating and arresting tale—a story that will compel them to finish it at one sitting!

The Tragic Search

Our second thrilling novelet "The Dark Doorway" by Wyatt Blassingame is a dramatic, high-tension thriller about a young husband's search for his missing wife—a search that had its climax in tragedy and brought him dangerously close to oblivion himself.

John Calhoon, just back from Venezuela where he had worked for the past year, drove over the long bridge that led from the mainland to the small island off the Gulf coast of Florida. The thought of Janet, his wife, was rich and vivid in his mind.

They had had their troubles in the six months they lived together before he took the job in South America, but he was sure they would hit it off now. It didn't matter that she hadn't written in months. There was still time for them to start over.

His first hint of disaster came when he entered the only store on the island and was informed by the owner that he had never heard of a Mrs. Calhoon. Bewildered and uneasy, Calhoon drove off along the winding road until he came to a cottage which resembled descriptions Janet had given in her last letter to him months ago.

He got out of the car, went up to the door and rang the bell. A little boy came to the door. He was followed by a strange young woman, Mary Peterson by name. The woman exhibited complete ignorance about a Mrs. Calhoon. But behind her Calhoon recognized a mirror and some bookends in the living room that had belonged to Janet and himself.

Mrs. Peterson told Calhoon that she had sublet the house from a Mrs. Jane Murphy and that she still owed her some money but did not know how to reach her. From the woman's description Calhoon gathered that Mrs. Murphy was really Janet.

Why had Janet changed her name? Why had she gone off without leaving a forwarding address? These were questions which hammered at Calhoon's brain. Disappointed and worried, he drove away. But he reappeared the next day on the off chance that Mrs. Peterson might have heard from Janet.

Oddly enough, she had. A letter had come from Raiford, Florida, requesting that Mrs. Peterson send the money due her care of General Delivery in Raiford.

At Last—the Clue!

This was the clue Calhoon needed. Thanking Mrs. Peterson, he was about to go off when she called him back. Hesitantly she informed him that the night Mrs. Murphy sublet the house to her she had seen bruises on her face and throat. Mrs. Murphy had appeared frightened and anxious to get away.

She concluded by advising Calhoon to go to the police. Calhoon shook his head and added that he would find Janet himself.

With panic growing in him hour by hour, Calhoon drove to Raiford. For two days he

[*Turn page*]

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loitered outside the post office in the little town. Then, suddenly, he saw Janet get out of a car and go into the building. She came out in a few seconds, putting money in her purse.

Janet got into her car and sped away with Calhoon pursuing. He followed her to a tourist camp. There he registered for a cabin himself. Waiting until nightfall, he went to the cabin where he had seen her car. As he lingered in the shadows wondering if he should enter, a man with a clubfoot clumped along the walk and went inside.

Calhoon felt a dull despair sweep through him. So Janet had somebody else! No wonder she had left no forwarding address. She didn't want him to find her. Dismally he turned away and strode to a restaurant and bar across the road.

However, he soon found that Janet was still imperatively in his mind. Finally, he got up and walked back to the cabin. The lights were still on though he couldn't see through the drawn blinds.

The Chill of Death

He knocked on the door. There was no answer. His hand on the knob twisted slowly. The door opened. He stepped inside.

His first glance showed him an open suitcase. He remembered it. Janet had used it on their honeymoon. The only garment he could see was a man's shirt. There was a sudden bitter taste in Calhoon's mouth. He started toward the suitcase, passing by the twin beds.

Abruptly he halted. On the floor between the two beds he saw Janet. Her face was livid and contorted. Her dress was torn at the neck. Dark bruises marred the ivory smoothness of her throat.

His hand reached out toward her. The flesh under his fingers was still warm—yet the feel of death was upon it. A chill ran through him.

He didn't hear the footsteps until they were on the porch. There was no time for anything except to spin around and face the door. It banged open. A man rushed in. . . .

This is the dramatic, suspenseful opening of "The Dark Doorway." From that tense scene in the tourist cabin stems a cycle of

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MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE

Every Issue!

swift, explosive events that threaten to overwhelm John Calhoon as he battles a grim conspiracy compounded of murder and intrigue.

Kidnaping and Murder

The third of our trio of featured novelets is "Portrait of a Killer" by Arthur Leo Zagat. It's an unusual, off-trail yarn featuring Beth Rand and Martha Winslow, two ex-Wacs turned private investigators, who get themselves involved in a nasty mess of kidnaping and murder.

When Ben Garlin, owner of a haberdashery, came to them for help in finding his missing son, Larry, the girls were eager to take the job. From Garlin they learned that ever since his discharge from the Army Larry had been running around with three smooth-looking toughs—Walt Durstin, Henry Strang and Phil Fator—who always seemed to have plenty of money yet apparently never did any work for it.

Larry had now been gone a week but the reason why his disappearance had not been reported to the police was that Durstin had given Garlin the following warning when the latter went to him for information about Larry:

"If you know what's good for Larry, go back to your store and keep quiet about not knowing where he is!"

Garlin had kept mum only for the reason that he was afraid if he went to the police for help he would discover that Larry was implicated in some criminal operation.

"Can you find Larry without bringing the police into it?" Garlin asked the two girl investigators.

They promised to do what they could, provided they could have a picture of the young fellow. Garlin said the only recent one he had was on his desk in his store and he agreed to send it to them.

After Garlin had gone, Martha made a telephone call to her boyfriend, Detective-Lieutenant Dan Teller to try to get some information about Durstin and his pals. Teller nearly hit the ceiling and warned Martha to steer clear of any case involving the unsavory trio.

Since they were women, Martha and Beth ignored Teller's advice. In fact, learning that Durstin and his friends frequented the Continental Bar they decided to have

[*Turn page*]

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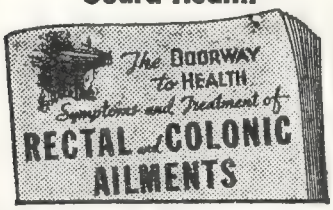

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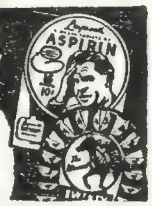

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lunch there. On the way they stopped off at the Crown haberdashery to pick up the photograph of Larry Garlin.

Introduction to Crime

When they entered the store it was empty. There was no sign of the elder Garlin or his clerk. Going to the rear, they saw the cash register open, the paper money compartments in the drawer were bare of currency. At the same time they heard a loud thumping behind a partition. As they rushed toward the partition they were stopped by the sight of a dead man lying behind a desk.

It was the girls' introduction to murder and an unpleasant and dangerous acquaintance it proved to be. How dangerous they learned a few minutes later when they investigated the sounds behind the partition and suddenly found themselves with a trussed-up stranger and an uninvited customer—Walt Durstin!

From this point the action of "Portrait of a Killer" turns fast and furious as Beth and Martha follow the trail of a murderer who had homicide on the brain and wasn't going to be caught—even if it meant shooting a couple of girl detectives!

Yes, fans, there's a real treat in store for you when you read our trio of ace-high detective novelets. And don't forget that our next issue will also contain our usual fine asortment of short stories and special features.

FROM OUR READERS

A NUMBER of letters have come in from MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE fans since our last get-together in these columns and most of them have contained rave comments about our Summer issue. A typical comment is this one from Harry Messner of Montgomery, Alabama:

Dear Editor: I cannot recall ever having read two better stories than "The Restless Hands" by Bruno Fischer and "Bedside Murder" by John D. MacDonald which appeared in your Summer issue. The kind of writing exhibited in these two stories is the kind I would consider representative of the best in America. And the plotting and the suspense was better than anything you usually see in so-called slick magazine stories. They were both top-notch jobs and tremendously absorbing. Thank you for a very pleasant reading experience.

You're more than welcome, Harry. You

seem to know a little bit about the mechanics of writing and we're glad that you were impressed by the quality of the writing in "The Restless Hands" and "Bedside Murder." Both these authors have plenty on the ball. They can handle characters and they can tell a compelling story. And they are both recognized as top-flight writers.

Gregg Darney of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, drops us a note to acclaim the MacDonald novelet in this fashion:

Dear Editor: "Bedside Murder" was a terriffic story. In fact, I don't remember when any story has lingered with me so long. This MacDonald chap has a way of writing and a way of creating suspense that sneaks up on you and makes your hair stand on end. It was well worth the price of admission to your Summer issue—and that's not counting the fine lead novel and the rattling good short stories that went along with it. MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE is tops in the whodunit field, as far as I'm concerned.

Okay, Gregg and you're tops with us for saying so. We appreciate your letter. Needless to say, we're gratified that our Summer issue was so well received. We think all of you readers will like our forthcoming number just as well. Just watch for it and see for yourselves.

Meanwhile, when you're in the mood for letter writing just drop a line to The Editor, MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE, Best Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Just before signing off, friends, we'll take a moment to recommend a swell new film, "The Great Dan Patch," released by United Artists. Starring Dennis O'Keefe and Gail Russell, this romance of the sports world tells the life-story of the immortal pacing horse, Dan Patch. It's a humdinger.

And now—it's *au revoir* until the next issue. Many thanks to everybody—and let's all meet again next issue.

—THE EDITOR

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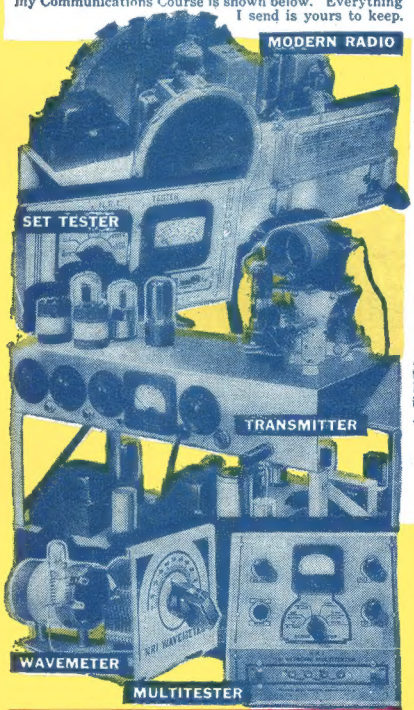

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